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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000ed2d>

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Women as Mothers: Changing Role Perceptions An Intergenerational Study

**A thesis submitted to The Open University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Submission date: 31 March 2008

Date of award: 4 March 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Rebecca, who is just finding out what motherhood is all about.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Jane Aldgate and Dr. Jackie Watts. Bringing this project to completion would not have been possible without their valuable advice and support.

I am grateful to The National Childbirth Trust for allowing access to their membership list.

A special thank you is due to members of the National Childbirth Trust, and others, who generously gave their time to share perceptions of motherhood. I hope I have provided an honest representation of their experiences, which lie at the heart of this thesis.

Lastly, to my family, whose love, encouragement and forbearance over the long years of this research, has been much appreciated.

ABSTRACT

Significant change in the positioning of motherhood in women's lives is starkly revealed by comparing the 1970s and 1990s. Though barely a generation apart, these two decades afforded socio-cultural settings of distinctive contrast. In the 1970s, for example, mothers felt constrained to put their working lives on hold and focus their energies on raising children. In the intervening years, however, feminist discourse, in parallel with economic and demographic change, served to strengthen the value of paid work above unpaid endeavour. By the 1990s, an increasing number of women would fit motherhood into the interstices of their working lives. These several considerations led to a broad theoretical enquiry, including the issues of gender, work, and the needs of mothers and their infant children.

The focus has been on researching perceptions of motherhood among women representative of occupational groups 1, 2 and 3 only (SOC, 2000). High functioning women experience a particular tension between motherhood and other life roles, as the literature testifies. The aim of uncovering the essence of personal experience suggested a qualitative approach to data collection, within a feminist framework. Revealing the strength of personal agency evident in the women's separate realisations of motherhood was an additional research aim. The fieldwork, conducted primarily through focus groups, involved a total of 27 participants.

The research revealed that finding an appropriate balance between 'personhood' and 'parenthood' had been somewhat elusive for both generations of mothers. In their separate contexts, motherhood as socially constructed was problematic, yet non-compliance with time-specific norms had caused discomfort. Women need to formulate motherhood in ways satisfactory to themselves, both personally and professionally. This reproduction/production tension in their lives is a matter for serious debate. Subsuming mothers into a discourse of women, more generally, has not so far afforded adequate solution.

CONTENTS

		Page
CHAPTER ONE	INTRODUCTION	1
	1. The Research Focus	
	2. Research Aims and Questions	
	3. Contexts for Motherhood	
	(i) <i>Late modernity: De-traditionalisation, identity and risk</i>	
	(ii) <i>Gender</i>	
	(iii) <i>Changing employment practices and conditions</i>	
	(iv) <i>Paid and Unpaid work</i>	
	4. Researching motherhood	
	5. Motherhood: The research field	
	6. Home-bound Mothers	
	7. Motherhood and Employment	
	8. Psychological Perspectives	
	9. Conclusion	
	10. Thesis Outline	
CHAPTER TWO	CONSTRUCTED MOTHERHOOD: IDEOLOGIES, NORMS AND VALUES	36
	1. Introduction and exploration of key concepts	
	2. The antecedents of modern motherhood: Preamble	
	3. The 18 th century: An emphasis on the nuclear family; early feminism	
	4. The 19 th century : 'Romantic' constructions of motherhood; the impact of First Wave feminism	
	5. The 20 th century: A continuation of gender role construction	
	6. The 20 th century: Gender deconstruction and the challenge of Second Wave feminism	
	7. Conclusion	
CHAPTER THREE	CONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD: CHALLENGE AND CHANGE	62
	1. Introduction	
	2. 1970s motherhood: Background and context	
	3. The years between the 1970s and 1990s: Trends and changes	
	4. 1990s motherhood: Background and context	
	5. Working mothers	
	(i) <i>A critique of women as rational economic persons</i>	
	(ii) <i>Full-time parenting as a financial and practical option</i>	

- (iii) *Combining motherhood and employment: Evidence of women's diminished status*
- (iv) *Advantages of part-time and flexible work patterns*
- (v) *Recent developments*
- (vi) *Working Mothers: Summary*
- 6. The needs of children
- 7. Motherhood: Effects and constraints
- 8. Childcare
 - (i) *The development of provision*
 - (ii) *The later 1990s: An increase in group care for young infants*
 - (iii) *Childcare: Final reflections*
- 9. Conclusion: Personhood and Parenthood

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

100

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Early considerations
 - (i) *A quantitative or qualitative approach?*
 - (ii) *Theories of human behaviour*
 - (iii) *A feminist research perspective*
- 3. Finding a suitable tool for data gathering
 - (i) *Recorded material*
 - (ii) *Semi-structured interviews*
 - (iii) *Focus groups*
- 4. Data analysis: Grounded Theory
- 5. Avoiding bias
- 6. Ensuring Validity and Reliability
- 7. Organising the Research
 - (i) *Locating participants who would fit the research criteria*
 - (ii) *Arrangements for the preliminary fieldwork: The telephone interviews*
 - (iii) *Arrangements for the main fieldwork: The focus groups*
- 8. Important considerations for research with human subjects
 - (i) *Ethics*
 - (ii) *Researcher Reflexivity*
- 9. Fieldwork Stage1: Semi-structured interviews
- 10. Fieldwork Stage 2: Focus Groups
 - (i) *Facilitation of the groups*
 - (ii) *The focus groups in action*
 - (iii) *The focus groups: Final reflections*
- 11. The Data
 - (i) *A manual approach or computer aided?*
 - (ii) *The analysis: A grounded theory approach*
- 12. Conclusion

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PARTICIPANT PROFILE

143

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Overview of the two cohorts

3. Profiles: Participants involved in the preliminary fieldwork
 - (i) *The 1970s mothers*
 - (ii) *The 1990s mothers*
4. Profiles: Participants involved in the main fieldwork
 - (i) *The 1970s mothers, Nottingham*
 - (ii) *The 1970s mothers, London*
 - (iii) *The 1990s mothers, Nottingham*
 - (iv) *The 1990s mothers, London*
5. Conclusion

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL TRENDS

161

1. Introduction
2. Women's roles: Traditional discourses
3. Some factors influencing motherhood role construction
4. Motherhood role status
5. Economic considerations
 - (i) *Full-time motherhood*
 - (ii) *Employed mothers*
 - (iii) *Consumerism*
 - (iv) *Retaining economic independence*
6. Motherhood and the workplace
 - (i) *Employment conditions and motherhood*
 - (ii) *Part-time/job-share arrangements*
 - (iii) *Perceptions of an anti-family culture in the workplace*
7. Childcare: Options and issues
8. Socialisation and quality of life
9. Conclusion

CHAPTER SEVEN

POSITIONING MOTHERHOOD

198

1. Introduction
2. The Importance of retaining personhood in a context of motherhood
 - (i) *The issue of identity*
 - (ii) *The need for adult company*
 - (iii) *The place of motherhood in women's lives*
3. Mothering: influences and styles
4. Motherhood and other-hood: Balance and conflict
 - (i) *Discourses of motherhood*
 - (ii) *Full-time motherhood: Personal perspectives*
 - (iii) *Combining work and motherhood: Personal perspectives*
5. Self-evaluation
 - (i) *Achieving and sustaining standards*

	(ii) <i>Motherhood in retrospect</i>	
	6. Conclusion	
CHAPTER EIGHT	MOTHERS, BABIES AND OTHERS: INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT	230
	1. Introduction	
	2. Giving birth	
	3. The baby	
	(i) <i>Health and well-being</i>	
	(ii) <i>Breastfeeding</i>	
	(iii) <i>Crying babies</i>	
	(iv) <i>Contented babies</i>	
	4. Advice and Support	
	5. Fathers and Partners	
	(i) <i>Preamble</i>	
	(ii) <i>'1970s-style' fathers</i>	
	(iii) <i>'1990s-style' fathers</i>	
	6. Social Networks	
	7. Conclusion	
CHAPTER NINE	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS	267
	1. Introduction	
	2. Paid and unpaid work	
	(i) <i>Status</i>	
	(ii) <i>Mothers returning to employment</i>	
	(iii) <i>Benefits and drawbacks of paid employment</i>	
	3. Two generations: Norms, needs and values	
	4. Early motherhood experience	
	(i) <i>The neonatal period</i>	
	(ii) <i>Fathers</i>	
	(iii) <i>Sources of support and advice</i>	
	(iv) <i>Childcare</i>	
	5. Motherhood: Constructions and constraints	
	6. Consideration of what might be done	
	(i) <i>Preamble</i>	
	(ii) <i>Parents in the workforce</i>	
	(iii) <i>Payment for parenting</i>	
	(iv) <i>30-month plan</i>	
	7. Closing remarks	
APPENDIX I	Diagram: Women as Mother, Influences and Constraints	291
APPENDIX II	Call for subjects to take part in a research project	292
APPENDIX III	Telephone Interviews	294

APPENDIX IV	Letter to focus group participants	296
APPENDIX V	Topic List	299
APPENDIX VI	Focus Groups: Facilitator’s notes	301
APPENDIX VII	Focus Groups: Session outline	304
BIBLIOGRAPHY		305

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. The Research Focus

The last three decades of the twentieth century witnessed significant changes in the definition and expression of women's roles in society. This research studies one role in particular: that of motherhood. During the above thirty years a range of different perceptions of motherhood have been available for women to contemplate: motherhood as idealised; as confining and constraining; and motherhood as reconstructed through feminism, individualism and consumerism. The ways in which motherhood has been perceived by two generations of women during a period of significant social change is at the heart of this thesis. The decades of the 1970s and 1990s have been selected for specific focus with the aim of researching the motherhood role perceptions of two groups of women just a generation apart.

A person's perceptions of her or his roles can indicate their beliefs and values, define their judgements about rights and obligations and serve to both define and maintain their identity (Knutsson, 1997). The research focus has been specific in its aim of exploring the perceptions of the motherhood role of aspirational women from broadly professional backgrounds. This specific focus was selected from evidence that a tension between motherhood and other life roles, like paid work, became increasingly manifest in the lives of such women during the later years of the 20th century (Badinter, 1980; Parker, 1995).

A focus on modern motherhood of necessity is part of a more general research focus on women, the rights they have, or do not have, and the roles they play, or might play, in society. For example, early searches in the literature suggested that the 1970s generation of mothers, albeit on the cusp of social change, for the most part subscribed to a construction of themselves as full-time mothers, at least in their children's infancy. For the majority of the 1990s generation, however, the parallel management of paid work and motherhood was of increasing salience. The contested issue of meeting children's needs through alternative models of care whilst their mothers work is part of a wider debate around the positioning of children in modern society. As the thesis proceeds, questions of uncertainty around motherhood and how the role might best fit into women's lives in a late 20th century context are revealed in the day-to-day dilemmas of mothers and are at the heart of this enquiry.

In recent times, fathers have been in focus too, but fatherhood requires separate enquiry as evidenced by a growing body of literature and research endeavour (see, for example, Connell, 2002 and Fisher, 2008). Motherhood is an extensive topic, so the subject of fatherhood will be considered only in those parts of the thesis where it is necessary to do so. It is noteworthy that within a single generation in late 20th century Britain, the relative roles of women and men are claimed by some to have altered beyond recognition (see, for example, Willmott and Nelson, 2005).

2. Research aims and questions

As indicated, a prime aim of this research has been to conduct an enquiry which would reveal different perceptions of motherhood by two generations of women who became mothers in the 1970s and the 1990s. Motherhood has been contextualised through a theorising of time, setting and situation to capture the texture of lived experience: an aim

common to a burgeoning amount of research endeavour about motherhood from the 1960s onwards (see especially Friedan, 1963; Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Rich, 1976; Oakley, 1979; Parker, 1995; Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Thomson *et al.*, 2008).

Early searches in the literature revealed that in the 1970s, for the majority, motherhood was constrained within traditional perceptions - as full-time and home-bound (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Friedan, 1963, Rich, 1976). By the final decade of the 20th century, however, aspirant women had begun to seek a more satisfactory life balance between motherhood and other roles, like employment (Wilkinson, 1994; Hakim, 1996; Crompton, 1997).

Notwithstanding a strengthening perception of wider choice, more recent research has demonstrated that motherhood continues to significantly challenge and interrupt women's scripts about themselves (Phoenix, 2008; Thomson *et al.*, 2008).

Engagement with the socio-cultural and economic formations of the 1970s and 1990s revealed the extent to which context had formed and supported women's role perceptions in each generational case. Further insights into the antecedents of modern motherhood were gained by researching earlier constructions through the literature (Badinter, 1980; Spender, 1983).

Motherhood is a profoundly embodied and socially complex process. What follows is a brief introduction to some of the critical factors that formed its conceptual backdrop in the later part of the 20th century. More detailed discussion of these critical factors is then developed in the two chapters which follow. As the thesis progresses, the potency of women's divergent and convergent responses to motherhood is broadly addressed through the perspectives of choice, agency and self-identity. In the light of contemporary research,

the discussion reveals motherhood as an unfolding story, contingent upon uncertainty and risk in late modern society (Giddens, 1991; Heelas, 1996; Walters, 1999).

The eclectic nature of the research required an extensive cross-disciplinary review of the academic literature. Additionally, as motherhood is an increasingly showcased topic, references to unpublished sources and to print and broadcast media items are drawn into the discussion as appropriate. Whilst it cannot be claimed that these sources have the status of academic publications, for it is not always possible to test their provenance, where they have currency and relevance to the topic in question they have been included. Additionally elements of unpublished academic work, such as PhD theses, are cited in cases where these have addressed some important debates around motherhood and with the key concerns of the research.

As indicated above, in the later decades of the twentieth century, critical social change was evident in Britain, as in western society as a whole. From the 1960s, for example, emerging discourses around women's rights challenged the ideological positioning of motherhood and its normative prescription in women's lives. This challenge became increasingly manifest in women's thinking and behaviour in the years that followed. To explore the issue of change, the aims of the research were distilled into two questions. The first is designed to probe the differences between the ways women perceived motherhood in the 1970s in comparison with women in the 1990s. The extent to which each generation of mothers accepted or resisted their time-specific socio-cultural and ideological constructions (expressed as 'personal agency') provided a focus for the second. The research questions are:

- 1) Are there significant differences between the role perceptions of women who became mothers in the 1970s, and those who became mothers a generation later, in the 1990s?
- 2) Are differences discernable between these two generations of women with respect to the strength of personal agency each demonstrated in their formulation of motherhood?

These questions informed the overall conduct of the research.

Early searches in the literature, alongside professional and personal observations, indicated how, through time, women have been inclined to perceive motherhood in ways reflective of the norms and values of their times. However, in the space of one generation, between the 1970s and 1990s significant change was discerned, most especially in the perceptions of aspirant, middle class women. Whilst a resistance to groups being defined within specific social strata like 'middle class' is acknowledged (see Willmott and Nelson, 2005), 'middle class' has provided a convenient descriptor of the kinds of women in focus for the research. A delineation of 'middle class' based on occupation, with implications of certain levels of education and qualification, usefully refines the concept. The focus of the research has been women who fit occupational categories 1, 2 and 3 as described in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC, 2000). These categories include, for example, managers and senior officials, professional occupations and associated professional and technical occupations, all typically requiring post-school qualifications (SOC, 2000). More broadly, such women might be described as occupying 'professional' and 'semi-professional' positions.

3. Contexts for Motherhood

Adopting a social constructionist perspective, the research locates the lives of 1970s and 1990s middle class mothers in the contexts of their socio-cultural environments. To give

foundation to the discussion, as the thesis progresses detailed consideration of the social and political formations of the two decades forms the backcloth on which the lives of mothers are portrayed in each generational case. Early searches in the literature indicated several debates of considerable complexity and magnitude which might be drawn upon, but the following summary indicates some of the most salient for detailed consideration.

To provide a brief contextualisation for motherhood, some features of late 20th century Britain, a period described as ‘late modernity’ (Giddens, 1991) are now presented. Whilst it has not been possible to cover all issues, some of the important theoretical aspects are briefly introduced here to be developed in more detail in the chapters which follow. The discussion overall focuses on questions of challenge and change. In the later years of the 20th century, for example, there was significant challenge to the authority of traditional constructions of family and personal relationships (Heelas, 1996; Habermas, 1999).

Challenge to traditional constructions of gender likewise brought about changes in how women perceived themselves. In parallel, in the later years of the 20th century changes in the economy, in part generated through changing employment opportunities and practices, further impacted on the lives of women, and women as mothers in particular.

From the 1970s onwards the increased availability of reliable contraception afforded greater choice for women about family size and spacing to meet their needs and preferences. Change was manifest too in the formation of families, alternative to the biological/nuclear model. In the context of more mothers working, questions of infant care and nurture: who should provide this and in what context became an issue of increasing concern both to parents and policy makers. The issue of childcare is explored in some depth in Chapter 3. With respect to all these considerations, there is recognition of some

continuity in the way motherhood has been perceived but, in late modernity, of significant change also.

(i) *Late modernity: De-traditionalisation, identity and risk*

Whilst traditional role and relational forms continued to constrain and rationalise constructions of motherhood until some years beyond the mid-point of the 20th century, from the 1960s these constraints were increasingly challenged and eroded (Firestone, 1979; Habermas, 1999). By the final decade of the 20th century, therefore, western culture had largely separated itself from the authority of traditional norms and constraints. With a growth in individualism, relational life broke away from a 'pre-given order of things' (Heelas, 1996:1). Traditional precepts and practices in place for centuries became increasingly disrupted, revised and rejected (Giddens, 1991; Walters, 1999). In essence, a growing commitment to personal choice became part of a more deep-seated rebellion against 'the normalizing functions of tradition' in western society (Habermas, 1999: 7). The moral authority for personal conduct and decision-making was thereby shifted from 'without' to 'within' (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995).

Before the discussion returns to the question of motherhood in this changing context, there is broader consideration of how individuals position themselves in a context of 'de-traditionalisation', described as a constituent part of 'high' or 'late' modernity (Giddens, 1991). Late modernity, it is observed, specifically highlights the features of individualism, globalisation and consumerism (Heath *et al.*, 2008). Late modern life thereby is conceived as 'existential terrain' where individuals structurally and economically fortunate enough to exercise personal choice aspire to construct their lives in independently chosen ways (Giddens (1991: 80). A mastery of personal circumstance, it is argued, is part of a process of identity formation connecting the external with the internal: 'globalising influences on

the one hand and personal dispositions on the other' (Giddens, 1991: 1). Attendant on this factor, however, are risk and uncertainty.

The globalisation of ideas and systems, in theory, presents economically advantaged individuals with the expectation of ever increasing affluence (Heath *et al.*, 2008). Evidence would suggest that conspicuous consumption, demanding two salaries and two ambitions, became increasingly evident in the lives of parents from the 1980s onwards, contrasting with the materially modest circumstances and privations of the 1970s (Wilkinson, 1994). Into the later 1990s, however, a focus on '*inconspicuous consumption*', or 'quality of life' aims, also emerged as significant. This new individualism was more about 'self-fulfilment', and about 'people's beliefs, values, expertise and experiences than about what they own, do or wear' (Willmott and Nelson, 2005: 30).

What follows next is a brief discussion of the concept of identity, exploring first an idea of identities as 'reflexively' organised (Bendle, 2002: 7). In late modernity the mechanisms involved in self-identity are revealed as more 'reflexively' understood than in earlier times, being organised by individuals through a process of conscious choice between options. Whilst certain structural, practical and ideological constraints on choice are acknowledged (not least in a context of motherhood), the literature indicates that in late modernity, the individual's identity is less likely to have been given and more likely to have been chosen (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995; Heath *et al.*, 2008). However, it is noted that securing a stable and satisfactory identity as a mother can be problematic in uncertain times when mothers are 'Simultaneously liberated from tradition yet compelled by parenting' (Thomson *et al.*, 2008: 1).

Whilst in a late modern context identity implies individual identity construction, from a sociological perspective it is often collective forms of identity that are fore-grounded, such as allegiances with others or shared biological or biographical features such as race, ethnicity or gender. From a psychological perspective, on the other hand, Erikson's work (Coles, 2000) reveals firm identity as dependent upon an individual having a sense of being a discrete, separate entity which is cohesive and stable. At the same time, Erikson recognises the phenomenon of 'social identity' in the sense of a person's playing out a social role such as motherhood: social identity is 'located in the core of the individual, yet also in the core of his communal culture' (Erikson, cited in Bendle, 2002: 11). However, some are of the view that all interpretations of identity (including psychological ones) are, at some level, socially constructed (Heelas, 1996: 5).

In this research the concepts of social construction, social identity, and identities as reflexively formed are drawn upon (Giddens, 1991; Coles, 2000). With respect to the role formations of the two generations of mothers in question, it is suggested that traditionalism, essentialism and oppression broadly connect with the lives of the 1970s generation. Conversely, the 'shifting and non absolute foundations' of later times (Heelas, 1996: 6) connect more with perceptions of motherhood in the 1990s and beyond. Others, however, would argue that in an important sense, motherhood and the mother-child relationship are the ultimate guarantee of permanence, even in uncertain times (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995).

As will be seen, motherhood is a profoundly embodied and socially complex process, contingent upon the ideologies and practices of time and place. As suggested, in the later years of the 20th century, choices about how to live, what to do and how to parent were opened up, albeit within the constraints of individual life circumstance. A late modern

notion of the 'reflexive self', as presented above, is of an individual having greater opportunity to construct an identity for themselves than was previously the case. However, for mothers as others, the factor of choice, to a greater or lesser extent, remains constrained by circumstance, influenced by discourse, and increasingly subject to policy interference (Carling, 2002).

Considerable effort has been invested in researching how identities are constructed in a late modern age and in anticipating the potential consequences of the paths chosen (see, for example, ESRC Identities and Social Action Programme, 2008). However, having a sense of choosing the right options for oneself and one's significant others can feel uncertain, not least in a context of competing knowledge claims from 'experts', themselves in a state of flux and revision (Giddens, 1991; Thomson *et al.*, 2008). Notwithstanding this circumstance, resolution to the dilemmas inherent in motherhood is sought less and less from lay sources of information than was the case previously with life experience and instinctual know-how increasingly rejected (Thomson *et al.*, 2008). In such circumstances ontological and epistemological securities for mothers, it is argued, are increasingly at risk (Waters, 1999).

The development of strategies for risk avoidance involves making choices. However, Giddens (1991: 73) suggests that the act of 'taking charge of one's life', of necessity involves risk and uncertainty in a context of late modernity, even for the economically and educationally privileged selecting from diverse opportunities. Mothers and fathers, as others, must give consideration to the future consequences of present decisions, not least for their infant children who cannot decide for themselves. The persistence of a gender divide in terms of responsibility and opportunity in this regard is significant.

(ii) *Gender*

Traditionally, in the biological sciences the concept of 'gender' has been biologically interpreted as physical difference between male and female. However, as early as the 1940s de Beauvoir (1997, originally published in 1949) argued that the female is not *born* a woman; she becomes one. De Beauvoir's thesis, and that of countless feminists who followed, was that women and men are socially constructed into differential power positions. The source of this circumstance, it is argued, is patriarchy, not least in the traditional family where the father enjoys primary authority and privilege (Firestone, 1979). Whilst gender was seen to serve and structure social relations around reproduction, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that the social differences imposed by gender were widely recognised and addressed.

From the late 18th century, gender role division had increased as economic and social factors caused a separation of working life from home life, a circumstance which dominated middle class society until well into the second half of the 20th century. Evidence would suggest, however, that throughout this time a high proportion of women had been frustrated and resentful of their subjugated role, both in partner relationships and in wider society (Friedan, 1963; Badinter, 1980). In the 1960s, however, a discourse conceptualising women's inferior positioning, embodied in a movement known as Second Wave Feminism, began to take hold (Firestone, 1979; Oakley, 1997). These newly emerging gender politics starkly revealed women's lives as constrained within patriarchy, constructing their roles in the family and, more broadly, in society:

A feminist theoretical perspective argues that gender is socially constructed and has as its focus, the different roles that men and women are expected to fulfil in society. (Watts, 2003: 7)

In the years between the 1970s and the 1990s pressure grew for gender equality; for women's lives to have the same status as men's and for them to have wider choice about how they could fulfil their needs and realise their aspirations. The route to gender equality, mapped by this new discourse, ultimately would be realised through legislative and structural reform (Keesings, 1976; Brannen *et al.*, 2004).

However, well into the 1970s, the care of infant children for middle class mothers remained full-time and home-confined. Even women well educated and professionally trained remained constrained by a traditional discourse that marriage and motherhood should be prioritised in their lives. At the same time husbands and fathers, as the family breadwinners, stayed connected with the external world of paid employment (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Oakley, 1974). However, this binary divide between women's and men's roles, as between domestic and external spheres, through the later years of the 20th century became increasingly subject to challenge. For middle class women, the aspirant seeds of a life beyond motherhood had been sown. But everything did not happen at once. For the majority, significant challenge to a traditional positioning of motherhood in their lives took several more years to take hold. However, as the 1970s progressed into the 1980s, feminist ideology, closely linked with a wider discourse of detraditionalisation made inroads into the thinking of the wider population (Heelas, 1996).

This brief consideration of gender anticipates a more detailed discussion in Chapter 2.

What follows continues the discussion of change by considering how a changing economy impacted on women which, along with other factors as discussed, encouraged them to remain connected to the workplace when they became mothers. Differential levels of status between paid and unpaid work in society are then addressed.

(iii) *Changing employment practices and conditions*

From the 1980s onwards, changes in employment in Britain from a manufacturing base towards a more service and technologically oriented economy had gender implications for who would achieve and sustain employment. Additionally, a growing requirement for flexible and part-time working practices in several ways suited women employees who wished to mesh work with motherhood (Collins, 1987). Into the 1990s, women's rising employment opportunities paralleled the shrinking levels of those available to men (Wilkinson, 1994). Mothers returning to work after maternity leave, a significant number being educated professionals, were in the vanguard of these rising levels (Gatrell, 2002).

By the 1990s, motherhood would have a more differentiated and complex positioning in women's lives than had been the case in the 1970s. For example, in the 1970s, the majority of educated professional and semi-professional women followed a pattern of college, work, marriage, followed by motherhood. For the generation which followed, however, 'singledom' became the norm for most post-school educated women until they were in their 30s, meaning that more permanent partnerships and motherhood were delayed (Wilmott and Nelson, 2005: 9). In several ways the later years of the 20th century presented the possibility for women to be more experimental with the 'placement of children in their life cycles', and with partnerships for parenting (Snitow, 1992: 35).

With regard to partners, the literature reveals how, between the 1970s and 1990s, men's contribution in the home gradually increased, though not in direct correlation with women's increased involvement in the workplace (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Craig, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2008). Also, once they had children, research revealed how parenthood inclined couples to reassert more traditional gender roles. This reassertion began during the

period of maternity leave, yet continued when the mother returned to work (Hakim, 1996; Craig, 2006).

(iv) *Paid work and unpaid work*

From the mid-1980s an insistent mantra of successive governments was that citizens should apply themselves to a 'fit for work' agenda. This became a persistent message in the minds of a population fearful of repeating the levels of unemployment and industrial disruption experienced in the 1970s and early 1980s. Paid work of any kind became increasingly valued above unpaid endeavour. In the wake of this circumstance, it is argued, 'the worker' became valued above 'the person' (Ulanowsky, 1987). At the same time, infants and vulnerable others continued to require care. Into the 1990s, a dichotomy of value between 'productive' (earning) and 'unproductive' (non-earning) increasingly served to inflate the self-worth of those who earned in the paid labour market, at the expense of those who did not (Tronto, 1993). More recent research has confirmed this phenomenon, with paid work continuing to have superior cachet over unpaid work in women's lives, for paid work enables women to build personal self-esteem, over and above other endeavours like investing time and energy in personal relationships (James, 2007). Overall, as the 1990s progressed into the new millennium it was observed that: 'What it means to be a mother is changing and fragmenting in line with women's increased participation in work and education' Thomson *et al.* (2008: 1).

Whilst the requirement that mothers defer to traditional norms and values was considerably weakened in the years between the 1970s and 1990s, as discussed, the procedural norms and moral values challenged in a context of late modernity presented particular insecurities. The requirement for women as mothers to develop and realise their individual plans and strategies, whilst potentially liberating and empowering, presented a daunting

task for mothers trying to forge life paths satisfactory to themselves and their significant others. Modern motherhood is an evolving story, and the significant challenge to women to establish the boundaries of agency and self-identity in this regard is recognised in this research. Not the least reason for this challenge, it is suggested, is that women's concerns and desires are more contingent and nuanced than is often supposed (Phoenix, 2008).

In conclusion, within a context of late modernity mothers, as others, have increasingly and justifiably sought the realisation of their rights and the satisfaction of their needs through parenthood, paid work, or both. For working women, constructing a satisfactory model of motherhood, with its essentially 'other-centred' orientation, has involved significant challenge and compromise in this regard (Edwards *et al.*, 2002). The lives of mothers, viewed through the different social lenses of the 1970s and the 1990s, reveal structural and ethical contexts of noteworthy contrast in this regard.

4. Researching Motherhood

As a role fundamental to all human relationships, motherhood presents a subject of particular complexity for the researcher (Downick and Grundberg, 1980). Motherhood is a universal experience; we have all had mothers, and many women will become mothers in their turn. An equal number of men will become fathers, and they will have their views and experiences of motherhood also. It appears to be the case that one's experience of how one was mothered, and/or one's experience of being a mother, has the capacity to generate a range of emotions. On the one hand, these may be positive emotions such as deep satisfaction and fulfilment; on the other, feelings of loss, regret, guilt, or anger (Oakley, 1979; Parker, 1995; Kitzinger, 2004; de Marneff, 2006). Whatever way they choose to construct motherhood into their lives, it is argued that mothers are on display and exposed

to the judgement of others, yet conversely, often isolated in their role, for motherhood is both a public and a private affair (Miller, 1998; Thomson *et al.*, 2008).

Anyone who concerns themselves in any focused way with the subject of motherhood is likely to begin with their own personal biography. Arguably, no one agent remains unaffected. As part of preparation for this research, therefore, it has been necessary to reflect long and hard on my own experience of being mothered, and of being a mother too. I therefore explored my own biography, engaging with the task of confronting my personal beliefs, values and agendas before attempting to gather and interpret those of others. The literature offered useful guidance here, warning of the ways in which personal experience can influence one's ontological and epistemological positioning. Maintaining a reflexive approach therefore has been important at all stages of the enquiry, from the formulation of the research questions through to the final processes of analysing the data and drawing conclusions about what had been found (Mason, 1996).

My engagement with issues concerning motherhood spans the thirty year time frame of the research focus. From the 1970s until the early 1990s, for example, I was actively involved with the work of the National Childbirth Trust, initially devising and delivering Education for Parenthood programmes in schools and later training as an ante-natal teacher, working with expectant parents to prepare them for birth and parenthood. These experiences afforded valuable insights into how expectant mothers were approaching the challenge of motherhood and perceiving its place in their lives. In parallel, research for a Master's dissertation (Ulanowsky, 1987) revealed some ways in which socio-economic change in 1980s British society was affecting women's perceptions of their paid and unpaid roles. Later research at The University of Hull's Social Values Research Centre revealed for me the ways that the discourses of late modernity were impacting on personal relationships.

Into the 1990s, preparing material for publication on families and parenthood returned my focus once again to the issue of motherhood. Finally, the personal experience of raising four children through a period of changing norms, values, conditions and practices required significant focus on the question of women's roles in general and motherhood in particular. Early widowhood brought into sharp relief the tensions of managing motherhood alongside other responsibilities such as employment.

5. Motherhood: The research field

*We know more about the air we breathe,
the seas we travel, than about the meaning
and nature of motherhood*
(Rich, 1976).

For the reasons discussed, from the 1960s onwards motherhood became increasingly viewed as problematic and therefore a rich topic for research (Boulton, 1983; Arendell, 2000). The requirements of this present research indicated that an inter-disciplinary literature search would be required to account for all elements. Material was accessed from a wide spectrum of both published and unpublished sources to identify research trends and locate the project within the knowledge field. In addition to academic literature, media representations of motherhood were also sourced, as discussed.

This is a vast field of study so it has been necessary to fix the parameters of the enquiry. As stated earlier, the focus of the research is on women with backgrounds in occupational sectors 1, 2 and 3 (SOC, 2000). The study does not therefore claim to be representative of other socio-economic groups, nor of the population as a whole. It is important to record that there has been no specific attempt to include, for example, representations of race and

ethnicity, sexual orientation, or single/partnered parenthood. These limitations broadly apply to the literature review also.

To contextualise the study, a survey of previous research was conducted. What follows is not a comprehensive overview but a selective account categorised into specific areas relevant to the research aims. Whilst none of the research cited below addresses the specific questions of my own research, each engages with one or other of its critical aspects. For example, the selection includes research into the home-based lives of educated middle class mothers of the 1970s. In a later, 1990s context, research endeavour focused primarily on women who needed to balance motherhood with paid employment. In summary, alongside conducting a broader search into the critical texts on motherhood, the work cited below affords sociological insights into some important contextual factors of motherhood in the two different eras. It also highlights the ways that different discourses around women's rights and roles have both impacted on, and, in turn, been influenced by policy in those times.

In parallel with research from a sociological perspective, the search revealed a steady flow of work presenting psychological and psycho-therapeutic perspectives on motherhood. Topics of relevance include women's experiences of conflict between themselves as persons and themselves as mothers; the question of motherhood role ambivalence; and women's well-being in the context of motherhood. Overall, the literature search revealed clear evidence of a burgeoning interest in motherhood in the later years of the 20th century. More recent research has had a greater focus on middle class women from professional backgrounds, articulating a tension between motherhood and paid work.

Some of the work cited below is revisited in later chapters, as appropriate. Work by Friedan, (1963); Myrdal and Klein (1968); Oakley (1974); Rich (1976) Edwards *et al.* (2002); Brannen *et al.* (2004) and Thomson *et al.* (2008) are examples. What follows now is a review of selected research. As indicated, the discussion focuses on research enterprise of particular relevance to this present research on *Women as Mothers: Changing Role Perceptions*. The discussion is divided into three categories: 'Home-bound Mothers', 'Motherhood and Employment' and 'Psychological Perspectives'. The first two categories provide insights into the socio-cultural settings of motherhood in the 1970s and 1990s respectively. The third category, on the other hand, considers research that has looked at the concerns of mothers from a more individual/psychological perspective.

6. Home-bound Mothers

For almost three centuries in the western world, home-making and motherhood dominated the lives of middle class women (Badinter, 1980). The lives of college-educated women in mid-twentieth century America reflected this norm, providing an important research focus for Betty Friedan. Her radical thesis, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), distilled out of an extensive study of the lives and perspectives of such women, revealed them as yearning for something in their lives beyond home, husband, and children. Friedan therefore exhorts her subjects, and those like them, to challenge a cultural definition of themselves as carers and nurturers only and seek self-fulfilment in contexts beyond home and family. Friedan's work, in important ways, presented a conceptual breakthrough for women. Rich (1976: 13), develops this theme, arguing that constructing their lives only through motherhood had 'ghettoised and degraded' women's 'potentialities'. Rich's work became part of a growing volume of feminist polemic communicating a message of liberation for women from the oppression of motherhood (see, for example, Firestone, 1979, published originally

in 1970, and Greer, 1999a, published originally in 1971). These and related texts are given more in-depth consideration in the chapter which follows.

Notwithstanding the burgeoning amount of feminist literature in the 1960s and 1970s, research focusing specifically on the day-to-day experiences of home-bound mothers did not appear in any significant quantity until quite late on. Sociologist, Ann Oakley (1974) suggests a possible reason for this. Her view is that marriage and the family were seen as low-status topics for research and avoided by the male sociologists who dominated the field in the 1970s. Oakley's (1974) study of housework did much to counteract this neglect by focusing on the daily lives of forty housewives to examine their levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their home-bound lives. Oakley's later work developed a theme of structural challenge to women's positioning in society which was introduced in this early work. The overall message of Oakley's work in the 1970s is that women's lives had become separated from the flow of life; a product, she argues, of western industrial practices and values (Oakley, 1974 and 1979). In another way, the manner in which Oakley's work was conducted contravened dominant trends in sociological research by challenging the idea that only quantitative studies with large population samples could guarantee reliable results.

Research by Myrdal and Klein (1968) was undertaken somewhat earlier than Oakley's 1974 work, but had a similar focus on the homebound lives of wives and mothers.

Conducted at the invitation of the International Federation of University Women, its specific aim was to find out what social reform would be necessary for educated women to achieve reconciliation between their 'actual' and 'potential' existences. Whilst the initial research data had been collected in the 1950s, which might be viewed as a pre-feminist era, it was later revisited by Myrdal and Klein (1968), which perhaps explains the authors'

clear articulation of some strands of feminist discourse. For example, they recommend that *both* parents should be committed to fulfilling family duties and responsibilities in order that each might achieve balance in their lives between work and parenting. The exception would be 'mothers on active duty', women involved in the care and nurture of young infants (Myrdal and Klein, 1968: 90).

It was interesting to engage with the work of Myrdal and Klein and to note how, whilst the norms and values of the 1950s had been influential in their approach to motherhood, awareness was shown of new perspectives on parental roles and women's positioning in relation to these. In another sense their work might be judged as standing outside its period, not least in its recognition that, in significant ways, motherhood is socially constructed. Furthermore, the work of Myrdal and Klein (1968) reveals that women as mothers experience unresolved role tensions, a circumstance that has characterised the existence of many women who are mothers to the present time. Thirdly, the research concluded that by focusing her energies in the home, a woman does not find her efforts 'explicitly defined or totalled' (Myrdal and Klein, 1968: 188-189). Overall, Myrdal and Klein argue that in a context of marriage and motherhood, women lack the opportunity to put their personal talents and education to good use, representing a loss to society as to women themselves. In this regard their research might be seen to anticipate Oakley's (1974) work.

It is noteworthy that from the 1970s onwards sociological research into motherhood, for the most part, was set within a feminist paradigm notwithstanding the comment that 'Theory informed by feminism remains a minority interest in the academy' (Griffiths, 1995: 36). Into the 1980s, with increasing numbers of mothers returning to the workplace

within a year of giving birth, the focus of research interest shifted to women's management of their dual employment/care roles.

7. Motherhood and Employment

Whilst earlier research about motherhood was concerned to address the predicament of educated middle class women frustrated with their home-based existences, later research demonstrated increasing interest in the stresses and strains of life for women as working mothers. Comparative studies exploring the relative experiences of mothers working full-time, part-time, or not at all were increasingly in evidence as the 1980s progressed into the 1990s. Additional to exploring issues of role balance, the question of overall life satisfaction for women as mothers also came into prominence. Haw (1986), for example, looked at the question of work and well-being by conducting a comparative study of employed women and housewives. Involvement in paid work, Haw finds, gives women a heightened sense of status, affording them greater benefits overall, than being at home full-time, caring for children. Around that same time, Collins (1987) studied 60 mother/infant dyads from birth to 15 months, with a focus on the relationship between the mothers' involvement in part-time work and their infants' socio-emotional development. The issues of maternal satisfaction and role strain were also considered. In common with Haw (1986), Collins concluded that paid work, at least on a part-time basis of less than 20 hours a week, indicates greater benefits overall when compared with full-time motherhood. These findings were later endorsed in research by Frangoulis (1998).

It became apparent when reviewing the literature that the subject of life balance for working mothers was increasingly fore-grounded as the 1990s progressed. Focusing on the concepts of 'choice' and 'constraint', research by Brannen (1990), for example, considered the ways in which women might successfully combine motherhood and employment. Out

of a complex analysis, Hakim's (1996) later seminal work revealed that women's choices around work and motherhood are heterogeneous. Broadly speaking, her conclusion is that it is not full-time careers that most mothers seek, but part-time employment, towards the achievement of appropriate balance for themselves and their significant others. Hakim's findings presented a rather different conclusion from a perception of educated 1990s mothers displaying ever stronger attachment to full-time careers than earlier cohorts had done. Further consideration of Hakim's (1996) analysis is provided in Chapter 3 as part of a more detailed discussion of work and motherhood. For now, it is important to note that conclusions broadly similar to Hakim's were evident in later research, for example in work conducted by Edwards *et al.* (2002), which is discussed next.

Between 1998 and 2000, Edwards *et al.* (2002) collected data from 56 open-ended interviews with partnered British women with dependent children. Entitled *A Mother's Instinct? Paid Work, Partnering and Childcare*, in important ways this study revealed the implications of New Labour policy on expectations on women to blend motherhood with employment. In their analysis, Edwards *et al.* argue that government thinking is somewhat simplistic with respect to women's preferences. This research skilfully defines a problematic and abiding tension for mothers between the economic argument for them to work, and their sense of moral obligation to meet the responsibilities of care for their dependent children. This tension is examined in other work contemporaneous with Edwards *et al.*'s (2002) study (see, for example, Himmelweit, 2000, and Carling, 2002). In each case, a well-argued analysis highlights a tension between policy, work and motherhood in late 1990s British society. However, some might argue that these and similar studies do not account fully for the intrinsic benefits to mothers of staying connected to their careers. This is a point neatly illustrated by Gatrell (2002) from research conducted with 20 highly educated professional women who were also mothers. Gatrell additionally finds that an

important motivation for mothers to remain in their careers relates to a belief that paid work is afforded higher value in society than motherhood. A further interesting finding by Gatrell (2002) is that women resent being reassigned traditional gender roles once they become mothers.

The often considerable challenge of achieving an appropriate employment/family life balance for women as mothers is revealed in Reynolds *et al.*'s (2003) study of 37 women and their partners. The research has a prime focus on the impact of mothers' employment on family relationships. In common with other studies, Reynolds *et al.*'s research highlights the extent to which New Labour policy, implemented since 1997, impacted on women's choices around work and motherhood. For example, in fiscal terms the authors note how elements of policy create explicit incentives for women to remain active in employment once they have children; for example, by substantially increasing funded childcare. One further important finding is the growing inclination of mothers to construct their identities through work and work relationships. In relation to this, Reynolds *et al.* explore the ways in which modern mothers' identities are inclined to be either 'individualised' (self-focused) or 'embedded' (family-focused). In this regard, they find that women occupying higher status jobs generally position themselves more towards the former, though there are exceptions (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003).

My research focuses on two generations of aspirational middle class women experiencing motherhood in the last quarter of the 20th century, whereas a major study by Brannen *et al.* (2004) investigates four generations of mothers, and fathers too. Brannen *et al.*'s research also includes representation of the whole social class spectrum. Notwithstanding these differences, this work presents findings of interest and relevance. For example, Brannen *et al.* highlight the moral pressure on the 1970s generation of women with infant children to

be fulltime mothers. In contrast, they identify the more socially liberal climate of the 1990s as being one of enterprise in which women might live more interesting and materially better off lives than their own mothers had done. Brannen *et al.*'s four generation study of work and care patterns reveals that by the new millennium there were fewer signs than ever before of motherhood interrupting women's employment. However, in common with Hakim's (1996) findings, Brannen *et al.*'s (2004) work demonstrates that a resumption of work does not generally mean full-time, and that, overall, women seek patterns of employment 'consistent with their beliefs about motherhood' (Brannen *et al.*, 2004: 69). Edwards *et al.* (2002) found similarly.

A more recent intergenerational research project on motherhood is Thomson *et al.*'s (2008) study of first time mothers, *The Making of Modern Motherhoods*, which constitutes an important strand of an extensive five year ESRC Identities and Social Action Project (ESRC, 2008). In Thomson *et al.*'s study, motherhood is investigated through 62 interviews with expectant mothers from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. Twelve mothers from the original cohort were then selected for later follow up, conducted through a series of case studies one year after the birth of their babies. This stage of the research also involved interviews with the women's own mothers, their grandmothers and, in a few cases, their 'significant others' (Thomson *et al.*, 2008: 6). The case studies afforded opportunities for Thomson *et al.* to interrogate some intergenerational experiences of childbirth, revealing similar and also different ways that women have negotiated motherhood over time. An analysis of media messages and representations of motherhood was also presented by Thomson *et al.* (2008) in parallel with the empirical enquiry.

Thomson *et al.*'s (2008) research and, to a lesser extent, Brannen *et al.*'s (2004) more extensive project focus on some of the prime conceptual areas of this present research

including, for example, issues of identity and meanings around motherhood. However, in contrast with my own more closely bounded research, both studies involve participants representing wider socio-economic and generational diversity.

In significant ways the above examples of sociological research present the role positioning of motherhood as formed from a complex intermix of contemporaneous norms and values and economic circumstances. Examples of research presenting psychological and psycho-analytic perspectives are considered next. This work has focused more intensively on mothers as ‘persons’, on their inner lives and on their perceptions of self.

8. Psychological Perspectives

Motherhood featured significantly in post-war research conducted from a psycho-analytic perspective, but at that time it was concerned primarily with the mother/child dyad (Bowlby, 1953; Winnicott, 1960). In the later years of the 20th century, however, women’s own affective experiences as mothers came into increasing focus. For example, women’s ‘ambivalence’ about motherhood and their sense of losing their identity as persons when they become mothers was of increasing interest to researchers. Also, research looking at the ways women view their sense of competence as mothers has been conducted in the more recent past. Likewise, research addressing the apparent psychological need of new mothers to engage with other mothers has become a fertile area for enquiry. The brief overview of selected research begins with a consideration of one such study.

In her book *The Mother Knot* (1987) Lazarre reveals findings from her research which demonstrates the importance of support and networking for mothers, highlighting the greater benefits derived from *mutual* support over and above that from professionals. Where they had mental and emotional needs in early motherhood, several participants in

the study reported that they had often felt let down by the professionals, whose focus was on the needs of their babies only. In contrast, when they had the opportunity to connect with other mothers, Lazarre (1987) observed her participants conversing with such intensity that it was like 'a magnet drawing metal pins which were scattered across the floor' (Lazarre, 1987: 14). The research also found that the way women construct motherhood demonstrates that they both resist and reproduce contemporaneous images. A further conclusion drawn from Lazarre's (1987) research is that a common psychological state for women as mothers is one of ambivalence towards the role.

In a similar way, Parker's (1995) work highlights women's feelings of ambivalence about motherhood. Parker draws upon the theories of Klein as a way of exploring a mother's ambivalent feelings towards her child and her personal role performance. Written from the perspective of a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, Parker's study offers additional insights into women's self-perceptions in a context of motherhood. She concludes that women find the role 'intolerably difficult', not least by its having been 'constructed', then, 're-constructed' in many different ways across time (Parker, 1995: 13). Additionally, she finds, motherhood can undermine a woman's self-image. In this regard, Parker recalls a pithy remark made to her by writer, Fay Weldon, in a personal communication:

*The greatest advantage of not having children
must be that you can go on believing you are
a nice person!*

Parker (1995: 5)

Other research with a focus on the psychological implications of motherhood to some extent endorses that of Parker by revealing participants as finding the role both problematic and contradictory. For example, a mother may conceive of herself as all powerful in relation to her young infant. Conversely she can be rendered powerless by the motherhood

condition and by the constraints imposed by social expectations. Davies and Welch (1986) engage with this theme from a feminist perspective, highlighting the considerable responsibility placed on women to raise 'contented' children, which they summarise as 'the tyranny of children's happiness' (Davies and Welch, 1986: 414). In common with findings by Lazarre (1987) and Parker (1995), this research records mothers as experiencing 'the most exquisite suffering of ambivalence' (Davies and Welch, 1986: 412). Additionally, the findings of Davies and Welch highlight a problem for women of maintaining 'womanhood' in a context of 'motherhood' encapsulated within the dual constructs of 'dependence' and 'independence'. This tension is explored in this present research through the constructs of 'parenthood' and 'personhood'.

With respect to the theme of 'motherhood' and 'otherhood', earlier research by Rich (1976) explored the psychological complexity of situations in which women endeavoured to mesh the motherhood with other aspects of their lives. During the four year duration of Rich's 1972-6 research, she engaged not only with the motherhood experiences of her research subjects but also with her own. Rich (1976: 288) comes to the conclusion that motherhood is 'a theme which seems to possess the collective consciousness of thoughtful women'. Yet she notes how feminist analysis has not been especially helpful to women desperate to meet the challenge of rationalising its place in their lives. Feminist discourse, Rich argues, has a tendency to place women's needs and responsibilities as mothers to one side by emphasising their importance as persons.

For women as mothers, the role tension between themselves as parents and themselves as persons was an issue of increasing research interest in late 20th research in Britain. In several ways this reflected the realities of life for an increasing proportion of women in the 1990s facing the challenge of managing paid work alongside motherhood. For example,

one study from a psychodynamic perspective, conducted in the United States by Sullivan (1993), explores the 'role conflict' of twenty-one professionally employed mothers. One interesting finding from Sullivan's analysis is endorsed by the findings of later research in Britain conducted by Reynolds *et al.* (2003), discussed above. This is how the qualities of women's professional competence and achievement are in conflict with qualities generally associated with motherhood, characterised by 'relatedness' (Sullivan, 1993).

Similar work by Lappen (1993) researches the opinions and experiences of a group of psychotherapists to locate their sense of personal change and continuity when they became mothers. Lappen found that in the early post-partum period motherhood overshadowed the women's professional interests, causing diminished levels in their sense of adequacy as persons. Lappen (1993) interprets this phenomenon as having three possible explanations. The first concerns a change in their priorities from professional to personal; the second, their withdrawal from the affirming effects of social and intellectual engagement with their peers; the third, insecurities caused by being away from familiar work. Notwithstanding these factors, through motherhood the participants in Lappen's study registered in themselves a significant development of 'personal' attributes. These they were beginning to value and recognise as potentially useful in their professional spheres also.

As indicated above in relation to the question of motherhood as a research topic, earlier work from psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives (for example, Bowlby, 1953 and Winnicott, 1960), focused primarily on the critical nature of the mother/child dyad above all other considerations. In the later years of the 20th century, however, research conducted from this perspective shifted attention onto mothers themselves with *their* needs becoming the prime focus. At the same time, more radical feminist perspectives were inclined to deny women's psychological need to 'mother' (Firestone, 1979). From this perspective,

there was denial also of women's needs for space and time for mothering from an analysis that mothers needed relief from the care role which endangered their hard-won positioning in society. In the 1980s, other, more positive perspectives on care emerged, however.

The 'Ethic of Care' position developed by Gilligan (1982) and Ruddick (1983 and 1990) repositioned maternal qualities as a strength rather than a weakness, and of potential benefit for women as for the society of which they are a part. However, this more positive view of care was itself critiqued from the perception that it 'valorised' motherhood (see Tronto, 1993). This, and similar texts, present an analysis of unpaid care roles, including motherhood, as likely to resurrect women's inferior positioning in society. The question of women's positioning in relation to care is revisited and discussed in some detail in the chapters that follow.

9. Conclusion

This introductory chapter began with a summary of the background, aims, and purposes of the research. A sociological contextualisation for motherhood in the late 20th century, which came next, highlighted some features of late modernity which challenged traditional constructions of personal relationships dominant through centuries. The falling away of relational constraints for motherhood coupled with reliable contraception meant that the role and its positioning increasingly became a matter of personal choice. Individualism was highlighted in the notion of identities as being reflexively constructed (Giddens, 1991). At the same time, notions of identity were considered from both sociological and psychological perspectives.

Motherhood role perceptions were recognised as contingent on women's gender positioning in the family, as in wider society. Patriarchal structures, considered in relation

to women's roles through time, were recognised as undermined in a general erosion of traditional norms and structures in the more recent past. From the late 1970s, therefore, women as mothers attended increasingly to an analysis provided by Second Wave Feminism with respect to its role positioning in their lives. However, socio-economic factors and changing employment opportunities and practices in late 20th century Britain were also instrumental in changing the ways that motherhood would be structured into their lives. Additionally, the idea of unpaid work, such as full-time motherhood, was recognised as of diminishing value in late modern society.

The second half of the chapter attended to some important factors for consideration when researching motherhood. A review of the research field followed, focusing down on three areas of relevance to this comparative study between motherhood in the 1970s and in the 1990s. These are: 'Home-bound mothers', 'Motherhood and Employment' and 'Psychological Perspectives'.

10. Thesis outline

The brief sociological contextualisation provided in the first part of this chapter is developed in discussions in the two chapters which follow. These reveal constructions of motherhood through the lenses of time and discourse, demonstrating motherhood to be a profoundly embodied and socially complex process. Chapter 2, *Constructed Motherhood: ideologies, norms and values* first examines concepts central to the research - specifically social construction, ideology, agency and personhood. These are discussed with reference to the literature (for example, Tesch, 1990; Bandura, 2001; Stainton Rogers, 2003; Grenfell, 2004 and Erben and Dickinson, 2005). The chapter then develops into an examination of how specific ideologies have served to influence perceptions of motherhood and the ways that mothers have constructed it into their lives at particular

points in time. Perspectives from Chodorow, (1978); Firestone, (1979); Badinter, (1980); Urbanski, (1983) and Tomaselli (1995) inform this discussion. In the concluding part, the issues of gender and gender relations in a late 20th century context, introduced in Chapter 1, are considered in greater detail.

This contextual theme is developed in Chapter 3, *Constructing Motherhood: challenge and change*, which considers in detail the cultural, economic and political formations of motherhood in two very different socio-cultural settings. The chapter first considers motherhood in 1970s context, drawing in insights from the literature of traditional constructions of motherhood and how these influenced the formative years of that generation (Myrdal and Klein 1968; Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1976). The socio-economic and ideological conditions for a different realisation of motherhood in the 1990s are considered next, with a focus on the growing incidence of mothers in paid employment. Perspectives from Hakim (1996), Himmelweit (2000) and Ridgeway and Correll (2004) inform this section.

A detailed consideration of late 1990s Labour government policy and its effects on women's practical decision-making around motherhood and employment refers to the work of Carling (2002) and Edwards *et al.* (2002) to progress the discussion. The care needs of young infants are then considered, with a specific focus on a 1990s reality of increasing numbers of young infants spending time in non-parental settings. The perspectives of Biddulph (2006) and Melhuish (2006) are drawn in here, along with other seminal work. The final part of Chapter 3 returns to a theme introduced in Chapter 1 concerning what motherhood means in a context of growing individualism. The discussion draws, for example on perspectives from Rose (1989); Wilkinson (1994) and Markus *et al.* (1997). The issue of women endeavouring to balance their individual needs as persons with

their role as mothers is conceptualised as a tension between ‘personhood’ and ‘parenthood’ - an emergent theme in both Chapters 2 and 3. This idea is re-visited several times more in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, when the data is discussed.

The complex nature of this research enquiry required careful attention to methodology, a subject discussed in some depth in Chapter 4. This chapter begins with a consideration of some approaches to data collection, including some theoretical and practical issues for consideration when researching personal lives. An account is given of how the tools of focus groups for data collection and grounded theory for the analysis were settled upon, with reference to the literature (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Glaser, 1993; Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Bloor *et al.*, 2001; Silverman, 2001). An approach to research which incorporates feminist principles is informed by the work of Harding (1987); McCarl Nielson (1990) and Oakley (2004). Measures to ensure reliability and validity in data collection and analysis were addressed with reference to work by Mason (1996); Glaser and Strauss (1999) and Silverman (2001).

An overview of the separate cohorts of 1970s and 1990s mothers in Chapter 5, *The Participant Profile* precedes brief biographies of each of the 27 participants. Supported by quotations, these cameos afford preliminary insights into the women’s positions on motherhood. Detailed discussions of the research data in the three chapters which follow are framed by the three significant themes which emerged when the data was analysed.

Chapter 6, *Social Trends*, the most substantial of the data discussion chapters, considers in detail the participants’ experiences of mothering in the two separate time-frames of the 1970s and 1990s. Observations of the status of motherhood in the two different contextual settings are included in the discussion. Consideration of the socio-economic and

ideological factors which influenced participant decision-making about employment, childcare, and family life in general is also presented. Chapter 7, *Positioning Motherhood*, on the other hand, revisits the ‘personhood/ parenthood’ tension introduced earlier as an important theme. Drawing on some considerations of identity the data reveals what the issues had been for participants trying to retain a sense of self in a context of motherhood. Questions of role models, role affirmation and role balance are drawn in, again with close reference to the data.

Chapter 8, *Mothers, Babies and Others: intervention and support* draws extensively on participant accounts which reflect upon, illuminate and capture the essence of the early days of motherhood. The narratives reveal mothering as a largely unlearned role. The women’s transitions into motherhood are presented through recollections of giving birth followed by glimpses of life with their babies in the early neo-natal period. The relationships and resources which were available to them are described, with the role of fathers considered in particular detail. Overall, different models, both of motherhood and fatherhood, are presented in this chapter, with some generational contrasts drawn out. In the three data discussion chapters, theoretical links with the literature are made as appropriate.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 9, *Summary of Findings and Conclusions*, discusses the main findings of the research. Reference is made to some key theoretical and empirical texts introduced earlier to contextualise the social changes around motherhood revealed in the research. The extent to which the mothers conformed to, or challenged, contemporaneous constructions of motherhood in their separate times returns to the second research question which considers the question of ‘agency’ in relation to motherhood role construction. Other pivotal issues which emerged from the research are then considered. In

the second half of the concluding chapter, suggestions for policy are presented in the light of what emerged from the research overall.

Chapter 2

Constructed motherhood: Ideologies, norms and values

*From up close you can make out the individual portraits,
but they are subordinated to, or swept along by the main
doctrinal statement, which is overt and undisguised.*

(Miller, 1987: 588)

1. Introduction and exploration of key concepts

Motherhood may be considered both an institution and a subjective experience (Grimshaw, 1986). As the thesis proceeds, each of these ideas comes to the fore at different points of the discussion. This chapter and the one which follows focus primarily on the idea of motherhood as an institution by considering the ways that the role has been played out in different sociocultural settings. In later chapters where the research data is discussed the idea of motherhood as a subjective experience surfaces. However, it will be seen that the phenomenological accounts of the 27 participants who took part in the empirical work were positioned, to a significant extent, in the context of their social milieux.

Broadly speaking, perceptions of motherhood evoke a period in time expressive of its norms and values. For example, the majority of middle class women giving birth in the early 1970s would have done so in a normative context of motherhood as the central purpose of their lives, an idea dominant through the two preceding centuries (Badinter, 1980; Connell, 2002). In the later years of the twentieth century, however, a construction of women managing paid work in parallel with motherhood came to prominence (Sullivan, 1993; Crompton, 1997). As will be seen, both the 1970s and the 1990s generations of middle class mothers typified for the most part the norms and values of their times in the ways they perceived and constructed motherhood. Erben and Dickenson (2005: 1) describe

these circumstances as being 'in a state of unreflective embeddedness within a social milieu'. However, a clear definitional contrast between the two generations of 1970s and 1990s mothers, each clearly expressive of its time-specific constructions of role, is in some ways illusory for each generation experienced motherhood, in a sense, on the threshold of change.

As with any substantive and complex field of social research it has been necessary to fix the parameters of the discussion and define the key concepts on which it will rest.

Definitions of some specific terms integral to the key conceptual themes are therefore now presented. First, the term 'perceptions' is revisited, followed by a discussion of each of the following concepts: 'agency', 'discourse', 'ideology', 'norms', 'values', 'personhood' and 'social construction'.

The first research question defines the purpose of the enquiry as investigating women's changing perceptions of motherhood. As indicated, 'perceptions' can both describe and maintain identity, and they influence a person's sense of her rights and obligations (Knutsson, 1997). Changing perceptions of motherhood are explored in this study by focusing on the 1970s and the 1990s as two decades of significant sociocultural contrast. The second research question, on the other hand, focuses on the perceived strength of personal agency which each generation exercised in the way they constructed motherhood in their lives. 'Agency' implies a person's capacity to make practical and moral choices for herself. It involves intentionality, purposefulness and forethought. When one is agentic it is observed that one becomes, in a sense, a producer as well as a product of a social system (Bandura, 2001).

On several occasions in this thesis the discussion revisits the idea of individual agency as in tension with time-specific discourse. Discourses are inter-connected sets of ideas or constructs presenting particular views of the world and the way it works, or should work. Discourses can have significant influence on the beliefs, values and behaviour of individuals and groups (James and Prout, 1997; Himmelweit, 2000). A discourse expresses the encompassing vision of an ideology, initially through a message of challenge and change (as in Marxism and feminism, for example). An ideology will be perceived as dominant once its discourse has been integrated into the everyday life of a particular society or sector of society. Pejoratively, an ideology may be viewed as a rigid framework of ideas (Eagleton, 1991) and/or it may promote an 'unavowed power interest' through a discourse of 'systematically distorted communication' (Wright and Wright, 1999: 63).

Stainton Rogers (2003) correctly makes the point that a discourse works from a particular set of assumptions, values and ethics. In this thesis, different discourses are introduced in relation to how they have influenced motherhood at different points in time. It is recognised in the literature that in many respects the power of discourse is subtle and unconscious (Wiersma, 1992; Crotty, 1998; Sunderland, 2006)

Norms are collective ideas about the expected behaviour of groups in society. Rosenwald and Ochberg's (1992: 210) investigation into 'storied lives' draws on Habermas' model of 'recognised normative context' to reveal how personal accounts are communicated through a normative lens. In this analysis, a person's situational lens or 'mental frame of reference' is a 'social construction' (Tesch, 1990: 12). A person's values will be considered by a person as her prized principles of worth. At the same time, there is strength in the analysis that individuals are beguiled into thinking that the norms and values which underpin their lives are matters of personal choice (Rose, 1989).

In summary, the majority of individuals require of themselves and/or are required to operate within 'legitimate' models of behaviour by subscribing to the norms and values of their society. Whilst the literature suggests that 'the state' has the greatest power to impose its official form of orthodoxy, the usual interplay between person and society presents a situation of greater complexity. The late 20th century French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, in his theory of 'Habitus', for example, describes the interaction between the 'bounded territories' of a dominant ideology with current socio-political events and the fluidity and dynamism of a person's phenomenological experience (Grenfell, 2004: 27). Other literature emphasises the point that we can never know things *of themselves* (my emphasis), for our knowledge and understanding are formed by categories contrived and presented to us by society, interplayed with our own experience (see, for example, Gilligan, 1997).

This socio-personal duality between the individual and her environment, it is argued, can forge, at any one time, a construction or deconstruction of her role perceptions. For instance, with respect to motherhood, perceptions from external representations or stereotypes can cause turmoil for a woman when these conflict with her personal needs and values (Parker, 1995). Other literature reveals how cultural stereotypes can be both influential and problematic for women as mothers (see, for example, Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). Two cultural stereotypes of motherhood are presented in the research: the first in the 1970s, as full-time, committed and self-sacrificing and the second in the 1990s as part-time and managed in parallel with paid work. As will become clear when the research data is discussed, several participants had been inclined to challenge 'approved' perceptions of motherhood, but most had nonetheless submitted to the time-specific constructions of their eras. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) found similarly. The will to

doubt, it seems, can be 'powerfully sapped by an internal sense that societal conventions must have a sound basis' (de Botton, 2001: 13).

The research reveals how mothers have faced the challenge of attaining an appropriate balance between parenthood and personhood. The philosophical concept of 'personhood' adopted here means a view of persons as having a measure of individual rights and the capacity to give expression to their specific identities and fulfil themselves (Locke, 1961, originally published, 1690). This definition of personhood is different from one used in a context of bioethics, for example, such as in recent abortion debates concerning when a foetus becomes a 'person' (Haldane, 2008). In summary, personhood in the context of this research is about individuals having the commitment and capacity to make moral and practical choices for themselves. In motherhood, personhood is about a woman fulfilling some measure of her individual needs and rights in the context of meeting her moral and practical obligations as a mother.

The theoretical perspectives explored in what follows reveal some important ways that perceptions of motherhood are forged out of a complex interplay of time-specific ideologies, socioeconomic conditions and personal circumstance. In this and later chapters individual and generational constructions of motherhood are revealed as both reflecting and resisting these constructions. The section on the antecedents of modern motherhood which follows takes the long view by looking back in time to trace earlier perceptions of motherhood. Discourses of motherhood and gender positioning evident in the separate contexts of pre-modern, modern and, more recently, late-modern society are acknowledged in the course of the discussion.

2. The antecedents of modern motherhood: Preamble

This overview begins by considering 18th century Britain on the cusp of the Enlightenment, a period in western society when the power of reason was seen to challenge the power of faith (Grimsley, 1979). As the discussion progresses, early feminist perspectives are drawn in, with the ideas of Mary Woolstonecraft (Tomaselli, 1995) and Margaret Fuller (Urbanski, 1983) featuring especially. The positioning of motherhood in 19th century society follows, with consideration given to the ideas of the so-called First Wave feminists and, briefly, the suffragettes (Matthews, 1983). It is then noted that, following the First World War, although women's enfranchisement was achieved, there was almost half a century of apparent acquiescence to traditional models of motherhood before the clarion call of Second Wave feminism was heard (Lear, 1968). Throughout the discussion, reference is made to different strands of feminist theory to reveal how these have interrogated, challenged and constructed perceptions of motherhood at different points in time.

3. The Eighteenth Century: Emphasis on the nuclear family; early feminism

As explained above, the focus of this research is middle class, educated professional women living in late 20th century Britain. However, the emergence of a middle class with clearly defined roles for men and women was in many respects an 18th century phenomenon. To contextualise, the attitudes and values of economically privileged women prior to the 18th century are first briefly considered. Philosophically this period, before industrialisation and before Enlightenment thinking and culture began to influence the behaviour of men and women, can be defined as 'pre-modernist' (Mill, 1974).

Prior to the Enlightenment, feminism, in the sense of a discourse which advocated the claims and rights of women (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 1973), was hardly discernable in

women's thinking except for that of a very few individuals. One of these was Mary Astill (1668-1731) whose early correspondence reveals a surprising 'identification with her sex as a whole and a personal commitment to the advancement of women that mark the feminist' (Kinniard, 1983: 32). In contrast, in the 17th century most women from the wealthier classes were concerned primarily with personal pleasure and their positioning in society. A common perception of motherhood, therefore, was as a burdensome role, lacking in status and worth: 'Women who considered themselves above the common herd refused outright the role of happy homemaker' (Badinter, 1980: 185). For this reason such mothers typically placed their young infants with wet nurses either within or outside the family home. However, babies put with wet nurses often met with neglect, ill-treatment, disease, even death; it was a practice interpreted by later sensibilities as devoid of natural impulses and hardly better than 'masked infanticide' (Badinter, 1980: xi).

The 18th century, on the other hand, was a period of particular creativity and inventiveness leading to change and growth in manufacturing methods and commerce which marked the beginning of what became known as the Industrial Revolution. However, this period saw the rise of a new urban middle class for which work and home would become separated. This separation of workplace and home served to confirm a growing segregation of women and children from 'the business of the world': an arena dominated by men (Valeska, 1983: 76). At the same time Enlightenment thinking about man and his rights was emerging (Mill, 1974). This would grow into a significant movement in Britain as well as in France, where it would eventually ferment into revolution. However, women would be excluded from consideration in this democratic endeavour for some time to come.

Thus both commerce and philosophy supported a binary divide between the roles of men and women and the sites where it was deemed proper for each to operate. Society was

expanding and growing in complexity with the home increasingly viewed as the only reliable source of maintaining moral values in society. By association, this responsibility would require 'the containment of women' (Tronto, 1993: 51). Females, considered as of 'inferior intellect' anyway, were afforded only limited education in their home-based situations, their practical purpose being to 'provide sustenance and nurture for their men-folk and children through the construction of a place of leisured and domestic calm' (McDowell, 2003: 12). Males, on the other hand, were presented as 'rational' and 'civilised' and eminently suited to operating in the external arena of business and politics. From a young age therefore, middle class boys were encouraged to engage in education suitable for this task. In contrast, as indicated, the provision of education for girls was of a type suitable to *their* task. For the two centuries which followed, the binary division of middle class men and women into their separate spheres 'cast a long shadow over western industrial society with respect to gender role ascription' (McDowell, 2003: 13).

There is a considerable body of literature which testifies to the fact that western white ideologies of public and private life have restricted the opportunities of women in very many ways. These boundaries were and are therefore very much human constructions (see, for example, Chodorow, 1978; and Tronto, 1993). Enlightenment thinkers, in some ways, however, presented a more gender-inclusive analysis, albeit limited in scope. The French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778) for example, was of the opinion that the democratic ideals being forged for men had the potential to work in women's favour too, had not their lack of education continued to perpetrate their inferior status (de Beauvoir, 1997). It would be necessary for someone of independent and creative mind to challenge this situation and present a case for change, not least through the mechanism of women's education. One such emerged in the person of Mary Woolstonecraft.

Sometimes described as the first major feminist, Woolstonecraft (1759-1797) argued strongly for women to develop their minds as a means of gaining self-respect, autonomy and social acceptance (see Tomaselli, 1995, first published as Woolstonecraft, 1798). Motherhood received Woolstonecraft's particular attention who perceived the role not as a barrier to a woman's self-development but rather as a vehicle for utilising its fruits. It is by developing her intellect, Woolstonecraft argues, that a mother can more effectively recognise and meet the specific needs of her children, building their resilience to ensure physical and emotional survival to combat life's vicissitudes. Furthermore, she argues, a mother can guide her children and teach them to become good citizens, thereby affording them the opportunity to influence the moral order of society (Brody, 1983). Thirdly, if a mother should have the misfortune to become widowed her education would help to secure employment, thereby ensuring financial security.

Woolstonecraft's analysis rests on a view that duties should entail rights. For this reason the contributions made by mothers should be appropriately recognised and respected in their society, which should cease to regard the upbringing of children as a lesser form of existence (Tomaselli, 1995). In contrast to this ideal, Woolstonecraft observes that the majority of her female contemporaries were treated as 'alluring mistresses' and 'subordinate beings' rather than as 'affectionate wives' and 'rational mothers', which was her aspiration (Tomaselli, 1995: 74).

But in a wider sense, beyond motherhood, Woolstonecraft's analysis is that education would be the starting point for women's emancipation (Brody, 1983). In her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Tomaselli, 1995, originally published 1798) Woolstonecraft sets out a powerful case for women to be afforded civil and political rights, equal to those of men. In summary, Woolstonecraft is strongly of the view that women, as men, were put on

earth to 'unfold their faculties' and develop their powers of rational thought (Tomaselli, 1995: 75). Ultimately, rational thought, she argues, leads to the development of 'virtue'. In significant ways, Woolstonecraft can be seen to advance a feminist social critique, but, in her time this remained centred on 'virtue', which in Woolstonecraft's view was the highest ambition for both women and men (Wanklyn, 1988).

The two qualities of reason and virtue are God's gifts to mankind which only the vain and selfish would squander, Woolstonecraft argues. Her sights were set on the new middle class especially, whom she feared were in danger of aping their upper class superiors in their commitment to materialism, superficiality and moral depravity (Tomaselli, 1995). Above all, this early feminist believed that anything is possible in a society where its citizens strive to achieve truth through reason, maintain control over their baser selves and at all times consider their significant others:

*The transformation of appetite into a more
enduring sentiment, assisted by such 'forgetfulness'
of self binds families together.*
(Quoted in Brody, 1983: 47)

Unusual in her time and in contrast with later feminists, Woolstonecraft did not view the family as a barrier to women's development and emancipation but as a site for living out its nobler aspirations. The family was considered central to civil society, for without it, her view was that life would be 'a soulless, diffuse passion' (Woolstonecraft, quoted in Brody, 1983: 47). Woolstonecraft had the foresight to see that for her ideas to be achieved, civil and political rights for women would be essential. However, this aspiration would not be realised for many years.

The ideas of feminist Mary Woolstonecraft in her 18th century context are as distinctive as they are radical, presenting also critical perspectives on women's positioning in that society. Even in a 21st century context, some of her ideas may be claimed as worthy of reconsideration. Many more feminist perspectives and many more definitions of feminism have been developed since her time. Some of these definitions are discussed next, before constructions of motherhood incorporating strands of feminism in a 19th century context are considered.

Through time, feminism, with its origins in the French language has been defined in a number of different ways. For example, an early explanation denotes it as 'the (special) qualities of women' (1837); another (1895) as the 'advocacy of the claims and rights of women' (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 1973). Here is significant definitional contrast: on the one hand asserting the uniqueness of women, highlighting their differences with men (a kind of biological determinism), while on the other presenting a more radical, women's rights positioning equal with men's. As the 20th century progressed, feminist discourse increasingly emphasised gender equality (see, for example, Jaggar, 1983). A different perspective, cited in Mitchell and Oakley (1986) however, focuses not so much on women's rights as equal to those of men but on women's specific needs as women, seen as negated and left unsatisfied. Others have broader claims for feminism as affording a sociological lens, for 'a feminist gaze re-sees and re-figures everything' (Held, 1993: viii). Notwithstanding this definitional range, through time feminist discourse has provided an important 'intellectual gateway' through which women have reviewed and assessed their position, constructing models for change in their lives, as in society as a whole (Watts, 2007b).

4. The 19th century: Romantic constructions of motherhood; the impact of First Wave feminism

From the 18th century into the 19th and beyond, the nuclear family structure of mother and father forming a household to raise their biological children and sometimes stepchildren was increasingly emphasised as the ideal family formation. Whilst extended family members and servants, apprentices and the like often increased the family circle, the nuclear unit, with mother and father operating in separate arenas, conceptualised 'family' at its core and became firmly embedded in the culture of British society (Parker, 1995; Ulanowsky, 1998). In contrast with their middle class sisters, for working class women the new industrial processes required for them a separation of work from home. Yet these women faced their domestic responsibilities when they returned.

Through the 19th century, women's roles as wives and mothers were emphasised as a critical antidote 'to the vanity, corruption and self-interest of the public world' (Storkey, 1985: 36). At the same time, upon marriage all classes of women, in legal terms, in effect ceased to exist as their husbands had jurisdiction over their property and children. The middle class mother in Victorian society therefore may be viewed as powerless, domestic and confined, a condition perpetrated through the separate ideologies of both the Romantic and the Evangelical movements. In literature, as in the figurative arts, mothers were portrayed as perfect and saintly, with the concept of the 'tender mother' integrated into a construction of domesticity, perfection and perfectibility (BBC Radio 4: *Childhood*, 16.10.06).

In this context, severe criticism was directed towards women who placed their instant pleasure or longer-term personal fulfilment before their duty of motherhood (Badinter, 1980; Tobim, 1990). But there were some who challenged this ideology. For example, 19th

century feminist, Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) critiqued the idea of 'proper' womanhood as necessarily about 'domesticity' (Weiner, 1983: 61). In common with Woolstonecraft's earlier analysis (Tomaselli, 1995), Martineau believes women to have intellectual potential equal to men, albeit their biological differences prescribed different roles for them.

Martineau therefore espouses the cause of women's education and personally sets out to popularise otherwise inaccessible areas of learning such as economic theory. Women, she argues, should not be viewed as honorary or 'deficient' males but as persons in their own right, a situation, she recognised as only really achievable with enfranchisement (Weiner, 1983: 61).

Martineau visited North America and observed with interest how feminists in that country were critiquing their society in ways similar to those in Britain. An American contemporary, Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), took Martineau's thinking one stage further, however, by viewing sexuality not as separated into male and female but as a continuum from masculine to feminine, an idea well in advance of her time. Fuller's argument was for equality for all persons, no matter where they happened to be on that continuum (Urbanski, 1983).

In other ways, Fuller's ideas have much in common with those of Mary Woolstonecraft. However, whilst *Vindication* was written in 'indignant anger', Fuller's *Women of the 19th Century* is described as having been written in a 'transcendental mood of optimism' (Urbanski, 1983: 82). Overall, Fuller's philosophy encompasses a commitment to the theory of teleology which states that all things have a purpose in life. She proposes therefore, that if an individual lives her life according to clear and laudable principles, a transformation of self and ultimately society is possible. Critically, Fuller places in the foreground a requirement for women to free themselves from their dependence on men and

become self-reliant. To this end, Fuller convened 'consciousness-raising' events for women: 'A place where they could state their doubts and difficulties, with the hope of gaining from the experience or aspirations of others' (Urbanski, 1983: 77). Not long after her *Women of the 19th Century* appeared, the Declaration of Independence was published at Seneca Falls (1848). Officially, this was the starting point of the women's campaign for the franchise in America, an aim which these feminists and their sisters in Britain would not achieve for many more years.

As indicated, there were significant parallels between the ideas of Fuller and her American compatriots and those of feminists active in Britain at around the same time. A similar analysis of the causes of women's negative predicament was presented: their reliance on men; their inferior positioning in society; their lack of education; their lack of the vote; their lack of control over their own property and, lastly, their lack of jurisdiction over their children (Urbanski, 1983).

British feminist Barbara Bodichon (1827-1891), meanwhile, was committing herself to addressing these circumstances, which she viewed as perpetuating women's social, moral and intellectual deprivation in her society. Bodichon rejects the primacy of the domestic role in the lives of economically advantaged women which, it was observed, was reaching its 'middle class, mid century peak' (Matthews, 1983: 102). She bemoans the small-mindedness of the middle class, seeing these women as a group whose faces were permanently turned inwards towards home and family. Yet so much that was wrong in society was left to men and left undone, she observes. Bodichon took action and, in collaboration with Emily Davies, went on to found Girton, the first college exclusively for women at the University of Cambridge (Matthews, 1983).

Whilst women's *moral* superiority had long been affirmed, for example by male protagonists of the Romantic movement including John Ruskin and Herbert Spencer, women's energies nonetheless were required to remain in the domestic sphere (Matthews, 1983). A persistent aim of feminist endeavour in the later years of the 19th century therefore was for women to extend their reach beyond home and family to improve themselves and their society. This would be done in parallel with their political campaigning for the political franchise. Bearing in mind their success towards the achievement of these ends, Matthews (1983) notes that history frequently excludes the part played by early feminists (as by women in general) in the advancement of their society. Even into the 20th century, when Marxism was taking hold, a dominant perception of women remained fixed as 'part of a world that men are going to transform' (Matthews, 1983: 120).

However, notwithstanding men's attitudes it can be observed that through time, women themselves have undermined the achievements of their feminist sisters. For example, whilst the name of Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958) will be forever associated with the importance and drama of the suffragette movement, later feminists like Sheila Rowbotham consider Pankhurst and her upper-middle class contemporaries to be 'reactionary by definition' (cited in Sarah, 1983: 263). Although Pankhurst's aim was to confront male power, she is seen by some later feminists to have had done so within the context of existing gender and class structures. Even feminists of Pankhurst's own era were aware that unless women grasped the fact that sexual and reproductive issues were at the heart of women's oppression their cause would be permanently undermined. Some, therefore, presented more radical strategies, one being Emma Goldman (1869-1940); another, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935). For the most part, however, from a 20th century radical feminist perspective First Wave feminism was remembered not as 'liberation' but

as ‘middle-class conformism ... to help women under capitalism get ahead’ (Shulman, 1983: 225).

5. The 20th century: A continuation of gender role construction

Across time and culture, perceptions of motherhood have been inextricably linked to perceptions of women’s positioning in society in general. Not the least factor in this regard, as discussed, was that for over two hundred years from the late 18th century, there was a gender divide in the prescribed roles of middle class men and women, the former dominated by production, the latter by reproduction (Held, 1983). Women as mothers were defined by motherhood, a situation not significantly changed by First Wave feminism, which, as discussed, in several ways continued to ghettoise women in the context of home and family (Tronto, 1993).

Beyond the middle years of the 20th century, the human sciences for the most part supported the status quo. For example, psychoanalysis confirmed a traditional construction of a woman’s role as played out primarily through motherhood (see, for example, Bowlby, 1953 and Winnicott, 1957 and 1960). The close and persisting connection between the mother/child dyad remained fore-grounded, affirming women’s nature as synonymous with motherhood and motherhood with self-sacrifice. Attachment theory, formulated by Bowlby (1953) from his post-war studies among children separated from their mothers, was influential in this regard. Developing Bowlby’s work, Winnicott (1957 and 1960) argues for the ‘ideal’ of a mother’s total submergence in the life of her baby during its early infancy.

Apart from the circumstance of having been ‘corralled’ into men’s work during the two World Wars, throughout the first half of the 20th century and into the second, middle class

married women were confined to their domestic place for the most part (Firestone, 1979: 35). This model of biological determinism, some believed socially constructed women's functional aspirations to their detriment (Firestone, 1979; Badinter, 1980). Along with perspectives from psychoanalysis, the disciplines of social anthropology (see discussion by Chodorow, 1978) and economics (see, for example, Becker, 1991) presented arguments which emphasised the efficacy and efficiency of the biological determinist paradigm. A more developed discussion of this issue is included in Chapter 3. For now, it is important to recognise that until the later decades of the 20th century, social scientists were 'surprisingly willing to lay things at nature's door and ask no more' (Polnatick, 1983: 22).

In the second half of the 20th century, however, this dominant construction became increasingly exposed and critiqued by a radical liberationist movement known as Second Wave feminism (Lear, 1968). Before providing an analysis of the origins and development of this important phase of feminist discourse, it is important first briefly to consider why Second Wave feminism took so many years to be articulated and then so many more years to take hold in women's lives. An analysis of what economically advantaged married women were doing with their lives in the so-called 'quiet' years of the first half of the 20th century (after First Wave feminism and the franchise) is presented in Chapter 3, *Constructing Motherhood: Challenge and Change*, where the antecedents of 1970s motherhood are considered. For now, the possible causes of this period of apparent docility, termed by some as the 'false harmony' of patriarchal domination, are considered (Grimshaw, 1986: 155). Of interest is a suggestion that this false harmony was perpetuated by the powerful in society as a counteroffensive to the success of women achieving the vote (Firestone, 1979). Whatever its cause, the reality was that few middle class married women entertained the possibility of sustaining life roles parallel to motherhood (Rich, 1976).

Discourses representing females as 'other', lacking autonomy and significant only in relation to men and children, remained powerfully dominant. This situation is critiqued by French philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, in her powerful analysis, *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 1997:18, originally published in 1949). In her treatise de Beauvoir expresses amazement that women have submitted for so long to their inferior positioning in society. By way of explanation she notes that oppression of one group by another is usually triggered by an event and, when this is the case, the 'oppressed' retain some memory of their former lives and so commit themselves either to immediate rebellion or to gradual and sustained change. But women, she argues, are a special case, for due to their 'eternal' oppression, no such universal pre-oppression memory exists (de Beauvoir, 1997). For over a century, women's submission to patriarchy was depicted, as discussed, in literature and in the figurative arts through images of idealised models of women and women as mothers as gentle, altruistic and feminine (Badinter, 1980). However, the 'healthy selfish giants of the radical feminist rebellion' who would follow significantly challenged this abiding image (Firestone, 1979: 31).

6. The 20th century: Gender deconstruction and the challenge of Second Wave feminism

The Second Wave feminists considered motherhood a critical arena for action if gender-based oppression was to be effectively challenged (Trebilcot, 1983). The next section begins with a brief account of this analysis, drawing initially on perspectives developed by Friedan (1963) and Firestone (1979). It then considers an alternative strand of feminist discourse which presents the idea that the qualities developed in motherhood and other care roles could be usefully applied to wider society: the so-called Ethics of Care perspective (Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1983 and 1990). The discussion then considers a

tension inherent in the case of women's dual commitment to feminism and motherhood. Finally, the role of fathers is looked at, focusing especially on the question of whether gender is a predictor of different styles of parenting.

For two centuries, as discussed, a process of consciousness-raising for and by women had engaged them in a process of revelation and change concerning such matters as equal rights to the vote, to property and to education. Second Wave feminism, however, presented an additional focus for action: women's intimate relationships within the home and family (Ruddick, 1983). Personal life was eventually recognised as expressive of 'wider inequalities of power' in society (Walter, 1998: 57). As discussed in Chapter 1, Friedan's (1963) analysis of the lives of 1950s college-educated mothers was conceptually groundbreaking. It exposed women's apparent contentment with their home-bound existences, centred on pleasing others, as a 'mystique'. Within patriarchal society, it was observed, men had closed down women's development and women themselves had evaded growth:

*Confined to the home, a child among her children
passive, no part of existence under her control...
defined as someone's object, never her own subject.*
(Friedan, 1963: 81)

The sites of oppression revealed by Friedan's (1963) analysis are confirmed in Firestone's (1979) critical tract, which presents even more radical remedy. Distilled from the liberationist ferment of the 1960s, Firestone claimed that *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for a Feminist Revolution*, published originally in 1970, was the first clear statement of radical feminism. The work also claims to establish an interconnectivity of new wave feminism across Europe and North America. In both continents women had been disappointed with Marxism's lack of recognition of their needs and rights. In essence, it

was argued, women required a more radical 'consciousness-raising' revolution, one concerning reproduction rather than production. The 'personal' had become 'political' (Firestone, 1979: 8-9).

Into the 1970s and beyond, this new discourse of feminism increasingly infiltrated communication and education systems to reveal how women's personal relationships were manipulated within political and gender constructions, limiting real choice about how they might organise their lives (Gatens, 1995). The issue of an infant's lengthy dependence promoting mother/child inter-dependence has disadvantaged women across time and culture, it was argued (Firestone, 1979). For this reason, Firestone's goal for a second feminist revolution is not, as before, the elimination of male 'democratic' privilege, but the elimination of their 'biological' privilege. To this end, a deconstruction of the concept of 'woman' - what it means culturally to be female - is suggested (Firestone, 1979). Others develop this theme. For example, Riley (cited in Tronto) presents an argument denying the category of 'woman' altogether, proposing it to be, in its entirety, a social construction (Tronto, 1993: 12). In this analysis, gender is interpreted as a sociological rather than a biological concept; it connects with de Beauvoir's earlier analysis that women are not born but made (de Beauvoir, 1997).

Also presented for deconstruction along with traditional notions of gender was the nuclear family, viewed as oppressive and constraining for women through its 'iron apron strings' (Ehrensaft, 1983: 41). Beyond that, gender roles within the family were seen as representing both 'the epidemiology of women's condition, as its epistemology' (Oakley, 1997: 32). The encouragement by earlier feminists for women as mothers to establish and maintain laudable moral values (not required of others) for the good of their families and society (see, for example, Tomaselli, 1995), was interpreted as untenable and unfair. In

summary, the nuclear family of mother, father and biological children came to be viewed as 'a theatrical battleground for the enactment of gender roles whose scripts are written largely by the combined forces of capitalism and patriarchy' (Oakley, 1997: 35). As Friedan (1963) anticipated, the central thrust of Second Wave Feminism was to challenge the twin oppressions of child-bearing and child-rearing. In a radical feminist analysis, therefore, motherhood was presented as a central issue of concern, being judged as the 'antithesis of liberation' (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993: 278).

As the 1970s progressed, aspirant women began to absorb the message that their lives would not change for the better until something radical was done about motherhood. Motherhood undermined their autonomy, their opportunities for self-development and their economic independence. First, it was argued, women might avoid the oppression of motherhood altogether through the contraceptive pill, or abortion (Firestone, 1979). However, if women chose to become mothers they should be relieved of its practical and emotional responsibilities. To this end, Firestone (1979) advocates the setting up of 24 hour nurseries. There was experimentation also with a model of relinquishing the upbringing of one's own children in nuclear families by raising them with children of like-minded women in more loosely structured households (Firestone, 1979), conceived by Greer in 1970 as 'self-regulating organic families' (Greer, 1999a: 226). These and similar models were tested out but found not to meet the needs of either mothers or their children (Grimshaw, 1986). A more pragmatic strategy was to lobby for full-time day-care for their infants whilst mothers worked. This model gained significant momentum through the 1980s and into the 1990s, an issue considered in more detail in the chapter which follows.

Whilst it was recognised by many mothers that their children had a greater desire to spend time with them than they had with their children, some were sceptical of suggestions to

relieve them of the twin 'burdens' of procreation and care, in a sense lifting them out of motherhood. To this end, radical feminists like Firestone (1979) had presented a concept of the 'androgynous' human personality, differentiated by sex but not by gender. Some viewed this analysis as denying the relational and sensual aspects of motherhood, important to women (Rich, 1976). Accounting for sexual difference as 'mere biology' by constructing 'a fence which will encircle this area of difference and keep it as small as possible' undermines the comprehensive nature of women's needs and satisfactions, it was further argued (Midgely and Hughes, 1983: 161). An overall criticism levelled at Firestone in her call for women's individual self-assertion beyond everything was her inclination to 'ignore the complexity of human needing' (Grimshaw, 1986: 184). Firestone's (1979) work was further singled out for particular criticism in that it fails to resonate with the needs of children through a discourse encapsulating 'a sixties atmosphere of free-wheeling, shameless speculation' (Snitow, 1992: 36).

Whilst different strategies for addressing the question of how women might gain relief from the burdens of motherhood were seen as necessary more radical perspectives seemed to embody the values of individualism and separateness typical of the male-constructed world that women saw as important to change. A contrasting analysis therefore presented motherhood and the development of the caring dimension as an enhancing a person's life rather than undermining it. The benefits of 'maternal thinking' within a so-called ethic of care model argued that the act of caring afforded both personal and public benefits (Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1983 and 1990). It was observed that this so-called ethic of care placed emphasis on responsibility as well as on rights (Davies and Welch, 1986).

Until the second half of the 20th century the western philosophical tradition had kept the issue of practical care beyond the periphery of philosophical or policy consideration

(Tronto, 1993). However, in recognition that most human situations have an affective dimension, with attitudes and behaviour lived out in relation to others, the ethic of care model was seen by some philosophers as perhaps having something to offer (Gatens, 1992). Whilst others were of the view that 'care can serve both as a moral value and for the political achievement of the good society', they were also aware that unpaid care roles can work against women's interests (Tronto, 1993: 9). Given that an ethic of care both demands and endorses self-sacrifice, a condition well known in motherhood, it has not been without its critics. In this regard, it is perhaps important to recognise that the function of care can only ever be addressed with justice if its status in society is raised. Arguably, for this to come about, the care role needs to be espoused by men too.

Whilst both male and female partners are equally involved in the creation of new life, after the initial act of fertilisation men may abandon fatherhood if they so choose (Rich, 1976). Even when fathers stayed around (as was the primary case until the later years of the 20th century) traditional models of fatherhood envisioned men as independent of the day-to-day care of their infants (Polnatrik, 1983). For the mother, however, the embryo, lodged in the haven of her body, once born presents for her an 'engrossing task' for some considerable time into the future (de Beauvoir, 1997: 56, first published, 1949). Yet Polnatrik (1983: 37) is clear that no 'sacred fiat of nature' has determined that child-rearing should be the sole responsibility of the mother.

It is now four decades since feminist discourse presented a radical analysis of gender in relation to motherhood. In the intervening years there has been considerable evidence of its impact on the thinking and behaviour of both women as mothers and men as fathers. For example, statistical evidence revealing the amount of time fathers spent on childcare and

domestic duties from the 1970s to the new millennium demonstrates a noteworthy increase (James, 2007).

Yet levels of responsibility for and the variability of tasks between mothers and fathers overall appear to remain resistant to change. For example, mothers are recorded as taking on more 'primary' care activities such as dressing and feeding; fathers more 'secondary' or 'interactive' care activities such as talking to, playing with, reading to, or reprimanding children (James, 2007). A major Australian study involving 4000 participants endorses a finding that gender is a predictor of childcare practices, even when other characteristics like parental employment are taken into account (Craig, 2006). Other studies have found that a significant majority of men continue to display traditional constructions of breadwinner role behaviour even when this is not the case (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003). Into the new millennium evidence would suggest that the majority of mothers, even when involved in paid work, continue to take on the major responsibility for childcare, including the significant tasks of organising and socialising their children.

Research demonstrates discrepancy between belief and practice with respect to men's involvement in childcare, suggesting that men sometimes have a sense that they do more than they actually do (Oakley, 1997). Yet as indicated, other evidence suggests a significant increase in levels of men's involvement in childcare and domestic work since the 1970s. Whether this improvement is sufficient to build and sustain greater equity in parenting is not entirely clear, for to date the 'role strain' of juggling time and energy between parenting and paid work remains predominantly with the mother (James, 2007).

Feminism usefully identified the ways in which personal life, including motherhood, was 'constructed in the wider inequalities of power' (Walter, 1998: 57) yet alternatives to

meeting its imperatives have proved harder to find. As one mother in a recent study put it: 'Babies might be a starting point for a debate about what feminism could offer' (James, 2007).

7. Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing concepts central to the research. This discussion included a brief exploration of the concept of ideology and how people's lives are influenced, constrained and constructed by time-specific discourses. It was suggested that both the 1970s and the 1990s generations of mothers, whilst strongly influenced by their time-specific norms and values, had each experienced motherhood on the threshold of new ideas about its positioning in women's lives. These ideas would sow the seeds of change in motherhood role perceptions and practices for the generations which would follow.

An overview of the different strands of feminist discourse which served to influence motherhood through time was then presented, beginning with consideration of the impact of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution on constructions of gender. The discussion highlighted the ways in which these constructions endorsed motherhood and home as central in the lives of middle class women. Whilst the ideas of eighteenth century feminist thinker Mary Woolstonecraft had a concern for the mismatch between the rights women had in contrast with the duties they were expected to perform, a vision of the virtuous mother remained central to her analysis.

Feminists of the 19th century however, were sometimes divided on matters of motherhood seeking to bring radical change in the lives of women more generally by focusing on achieving the vote, on establishing equal rights and on accessing education. But women's traditional gender role constructions persisted well beyond the middle years of the 20th

century, notwithstanding de Beauvoir's earlier (1949) analysis that women were oppressed in both their productive and their reproductive lives. 'The personal is political' eventually became the feminist credo for a gender revolution which exhorted women to recognise how home and family were at the heart of their subservience in society. With a focus on motherhood, Firestone (1979) argued that women's so-called 'natural' feelings in relation to their significant others would be their undoing, for the minutiae of their lives as carers was a prime site of their oppression.

The chapter which follows reveals how educated middle class mothers of the 1970s gradually became aware of the radical ideas of Second Wave feminism, with a minority subscribing to its ideology. However, it was the mothers of the 1980s and the 1990s whose lifestyles would testify to the feminist aim of realising their rights and needs as individuals. However, the compromise involved in managing their parallel lives as mothers and paid workers was found by many to be less than satisfactory.

Chapter 3

Constructing motherhood: Challenge and change

A life that is studied is a study of a life in time

(Erben and Dickinson, 2005)

1. Introduction

This chapter considers in some detail the cultural, economic and political formations of motherhood for two generations of women in late 20th century British society. The discourses of patriarchy and feminism remain in view, with attention given to how these two positions influenced and constructed women's perceptions of motherhood at different points in time. Some important economic and political factors are also considered with respect to the separate ways the two generations structured motherhood into their lives, with a focus on the issues of choice and constraint.

The incidence of motherhood in women's lives has demonstrated considerable fluctuation throughout the 20th century. The two World Wars, for example, brought overall diminished levels of partnerships and parenting, whereas in a post-1945 period of regeneration the 'baby-boomers' became 'champion' mothers for their high level of productiveness (Joshi, 2008).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the later years of the 20th century witnessed a loosening of social conventions eroding structural constraints in personal life (Heelas, 1996; Habermas, 1999). The concept of choice took on new and insistent meaning in late modernity as moral authority shifted from external forces to the internal domain of individual preference. The life paths taken by both women and men became somewhat in the nature of 'existential

terrain' (Giddens, 1991: 80). However, the discussion which follows introduces some ways that the choices of women as mothers have remained more constrained than a general idea of individual choice in late modern society might suggest.

Notwithstanding this reality, as the century progressed there was a significant loosening of traditional norms for motherhood. For example, the question of whether and when to have children and in what context became less a matter of social convention and more one of personal preference. The age at which women became mothers increasingly reflected their socio-economic status, with educated middle class mothers giving birth for the first time at ever mature ages (Thomson *et al.*, 2008). Further to this, from the 1970s, reliable contraception provided further assurance to women that motherhood could be positioned in their lives as and when they chose. Likewise, women could opt for motherhood within a range of relational contexts. It was assumed that organising the care of infant children could be managed in a similar fashion. However, the reality of motherhood, when it happened, often changed women's anticipated priorities in this regard.

The literature reveals the ways that motherhood can have a seismic effect on a woman's life, significantly affecting her emotional and psychological state, her personal values and life priorities (Rich, 1976; Parker, 1995). Even so, in the late 20th century context there was growing pressure on mothers to return to paid work within twelve months of giving birth. Policy direction responded to an economic and social need to replace a culture of dependency with one of work (Carling, 2002). However, it is revealed how late 1990s policy had over-generalised women's needs and preferences concerning how they might wish to balance work and motherhood (Edwards *et al.*, 2002).

From the 1960s, the terrain of motherhood was a prime site of feminist concern, as discussed. However, whilst feminism identified some critical aims for mothers, such as how they might retain their independence and personal functionality, adequate solutions had proved harder to find (Featherstone, 1997). The so-called 'demon' texts of Friedan (1963) and Firestone (1979) heralded a significant phase of feminism, challenging patriarchy and deepening women's understanding of their unrealised rights and roles at levels never before experienced (Snitow, 1992). Later texts, theorised motherhood itself by revealing its social and psychological downsides as well as its joys and opportunities for personal fulfilment (Rich, 1976; Chodorow, 1978; Oakley, 1979). Whilst the 'nurturance' of motherhood was argued for by Gilligan (1982) and Ruddick (1983 and 1990) as a desirable ethic for wider society (Snitow, 1992: 42), into the 1990s there was little evidence of this idea having taken root.

In summary, to remain 'liberated', the feminist message to women was that motherhood should remain just one element of women's lives and not its 'defining core' (Snitow, 1992: 41). A vocalising of the practical requirements for childcare gained new urgency for feminists in a context of increasing numbers of mothers returning to the workplace as the 1980s progressed into the 1990s. An imbalance between the input to childcare of mothers and fathers however demonstrated that fathers could remain more, or less, involved as they chose (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Craig, 2006; James, 2007). As Snitow (1992: 43) remarks: 'We're talking about the slow process of change when we talk about motherhood'.

Motherhood in the 1970s meant that the majority left the workplace, unlikely to return for ten years or more, in the knowledge that their earnings would have been twice as high had they not taken this time out (Joshi, 2008). As the 1980s progressed into the 1990s, however, middle class mothers made different choices whether from personal preference or

from ideological/economic pressure. The growing social acceptability of maintaining a career alongside motherhood was welcomed by many mothers who noted that greater social approval came their way if this was part-time (Frangoulis, 1998). The implications of part-time work are considered in some detail in the body of the chapter which reveals that motherhood may carry significant penalties for women, both financially and professionally (Crompton, 1997).

The discussion which follows begins with consideration of the ways that ideological constraints denied the right of mothers in the 1970s to make choices suitable to their needs, disregarding their moral and practical supremacy as persons (Friedan, 1963; Oakley, 1974). The discussion then moves on to reveal how, by the 1990s, many women discovered how involvement in paid work addressed some important self-referential needs (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003). However, for some, an early return to the workplace had seemed premature and inappropriate because they had not viewed caring for their infant children as a constraint on paid work but as a priority in their lives (Edwards *et al.*, 2002).

The potential for personal self-actualisation in a late 20th century context in several ways has become a class issue, with self-actualisation deemed more possible for the middle class and educated (Giddens, 1991). Throughout the century, women's level of involvement in paid work has likewise demonstrated a class divide. Earlier, it had been working class mothers who were more likely to continue in employment. By 2004, however, 70% of mothers with degrees would be in employment compared with 20% of mothers with low qualifications (Joshi, 2008). In this regard, as implied, the situation of middle class mothers requires a fuller story: one of personal dilemma, pressure and constraint.

It has been important to consider how much real freedom to choose was available for mothers in their separate time contexts. The pressures of personal circumstance, the

influence of socio-cultural discourse and the constraints of policy on women earning, or not earning, served to undermine choice at different points in time as revealed in the discussion which follows (Williams, 2005; Gimson, 2008). From the early 1990s a growing tension between women's nurturing and producing roles has been in evidence. This tension, recognised by Gilligan (1982) as between the two positions of human interdependence and liberal individualism is kept in view and explored in the chapter as one between 'parenthood' and 'personhood'.

Into the post-war years, marriage remained the single most defining factor for change in the lives of educated women, causing, for the majority, their professional lives to cease (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Storkey, 1985). A cultural model of biological nuclear family with male breadwinner at its head and a wife alongside as support and helpmate persisted for some years beyond. As time went on, however, the most significant factor for change in the lives of middle class women would be motherhood.

2. 1970s motherhood: Background and context

Apart from periods of war, during the first half of the 20th century the lives of most middle class wives and mothers functioned away from the public arena within the home, caring for families, or, for the better off, delegating the task to live-in nannies and servants (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Badinter, 1980; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Melhuish, 2006).

Whilst interpreted as a life condition constructed *for* women, in fact, this pattern was sustained *by* them until well into the 1970s and beyond (Rich, 1976; Dally, 1982).

Until the Second World War, official records detailing levels of women's involvement in paid work presented relatively low figures across all social classes. For example, figures recorded at the end of the 1930s indicated that as few as 10% of women were involved in

the workplace (Daune-Richard, 1994: 72). The war years (1939-1945) however, presented significant contrast with the involvement of all classes of women in work external to the home at greater levels than ever before in history. For example, out of a possible 17.25 million women, 7.3 million were in full-time employment; almost one million were in part-time employment; and a further million involved in voluntary work (Myrdal and Klein, 1968: 51).

Following demobilisation, however, large numbers of armed services personnel returned to civilian employment communicating a message to the women who had substituted for them that home and family should once again be their prime occupation. In short, women should play their part in forming and sustaining 'homes fit for heroes' (Brandt, 2004). This requirement continued throughout the post-war period of rapid reconstruction and regeneration, albeit with more than sufficient paid employment for any who wanted it. Yet mothers of young children who wished to remain in employment were unable to do so as state childcare, expanded to meet the needs of wartime working mothers, fast diminished (Melhuish, 2006). A state manipulation of women's roles with respect to employment persisted, with women broadly considered as a reserve army of labour to be laid off in times of cutbacks (Storkey, 1985).

Taking account of these circumstances it is necessary to pause here to search for other reasons why, until the later years of the 20th century, middle class women, many with professional training, opted out of employment once they became mothers, if not forever, then for a considerable number of years. Earlier, the 'marriage bar' had prevented a significant number from remaining in professional life. For example, until 1946, women who married were not allowed to continue to work in the Civil Service (Storkey, 1985). A considerable number of educated professional women therefore had to decide between the

intimacy and companionship of marriage and the fulfilment of motherhood on the one hand and the personal satisfaction and independence to be gained from a professional career on the other. Once the marriage bar was lifted, at different times with respect to different professions, becoming a mother became the key determining factor keeping women out of the workplace (Daune-Richard, 1994; Brannen *et al.*, 2004).

Family policy was revealed as ideologically driven by patriarchal systems underpinned by child development theory which stated that 'the proper place for a child under two is at home with his mother' (Melhuish, 2006: 45). The literature from a psychoanalytic perspective noted with approval the total submergence of mothers in the lives of their babies (Winnicott, 1957). In fact, women's fulltime commitment to home and family was encouraged by a burgeoning amount of literature emphasising the importance of the attachment between mother and child (Bowlby, 1953 and 1982; Winnicott, 1960). This model of childcare remained largely unquestioned by the post-war population, anxious to commit its energies to family life and to raise well-adjusted children. With regard to parental roles, Mitchell (1971) cites Talcott-Parsons' observation that the ideal environment for a child is to have two parents, each performing a different role: the father 'instrumental', the mother 'expressive' and 'nurturant' (Mitchell, 1971: 119). This 'maternalist' assumption of a woman's role offered significant advantages to men, with some men recorded as having a particular aversion to wives with careers (Storkey, 1985). Whilst increasingly challenged, for the middle classes, this gender role construction persisted well into the second half of the twentieth century (Badinter, 1980).

A substantial number of the 1970s generation of mothers were raised in this environment of mothers in the home, prioritising their availability for husbands and children. Compliant with powerful socio-cultural mores, many drew on models of motherhood from their

mothers and grandmothers to determine their own 'needs and capacities' (Chodorow, 1978: 51). For all that, by the 1970s, an increasing number of women were viewing their lives as constrained within a 'feminised and juvenilized landscape' (Faludi, 1997: 525). This waste of ability and educational investment was also acknowledged more widely. For example, on grounds of equal opportunities Myrdal and Klein (1968: 89) make a case for educated women to take up paid work and address this 'gap in our democratic ideology'. In the context of the newly emerging feminist discourse, these authors observe wryly that a focus on the 'rights' women deserve, may disregard the 'privileges' they already have in not being expected to go out to work (Myrdal and Klein, 1968: 89-90).

On the matter of equal opportunities and gender role ascription, I recall as a child overhearing a conversation between a woman and her husband (Ulanowsky, 1959). The woman was complaining about her dull life at home and the man replied: 'I don't know what the matter is; here in the home you're cock of the heap'. The implication was that his wife had the autonomy to do more or less as she chose, in contrast with the constraints of long hours at work which he experienced. At the same time, it was clear that this man had no understanding of his wife's predicament: of her boredom and sense of being somehow left outside life as well as her lack of economic independence. Also, there was evidence here of a dominant rhetoric that the wife's work, being unpaid, was not work at all.

Interestingly, however, a woman's autonomy to decide about her day, which the husband described as making her 'cock of the heap' was, to an extent, confirmed in Oakley's (1974) study of housewives. Here, the women's relative freedom to choose their activities is recorded as being the best part of their overall negative situation.

The gender role ascriptions of post-war British society, with men occupying the role of breadwinner and women as unpaid domestics, is neatly summarised in the words of Beveridge, who shaped the Welfare State:

The great majority of married women must be regarded as occupied on work which is vital, though unpaid, without which the husbands could not do their paid work and without which the nation could not continue.

(Beveridge, cited in Crompton, 1997: 56)

Rich (1976) cites politics alongside patriarchy as at the root of women's subordinate positioning in society at that time. A belief that home-making formed a constituent part of a woman's 'femininity' only served to reinforce the situation (Boulton, 1983). As indicated, women's sacrifice of personal aspirations in order to fulfil the roles of wife, mother and homemaker presented significant opportunities for their men, who, free of home responsibilities, were able to concentrate on career advancement. In this regard, Hakim (1996) quotes economist Galbraith's pithy remark that: 'the conversion of women into a crypto-servant class was an economic accomplishment of first importance' (Hakim, 1996:15).

3. The years between the 1970s and 1990s: Trends and changes

Welfare systems and cultural inheritance are joint determinants of family relationships.

(Carling, 2002: 4)

The period between the 1970s and the 1990s were years of significant social change, evident in family structures and lifestyles affecting the role of women especially. Advances in reproductive technologies allowed greater control over fertility with respect to family size and formation, as discussed. There were significant improvements for women in the

workplace too, enshrined in legislation. Anti-discrimination law and the implementation of statutory rights to maternity leave formed part of a wider package of employment protection available to all (Keesings, 1976; Brannen *et al.*, 2004). These developments encouraged mothers of young infants to return to employment in ever-increasing numbers in the 1980s. Lastly, change in both the categories and patterns of work in these years favoured women above their male counterparts (Hakim, 1996). However, in terms of earning power, the gender gap remained resistant to a significant narrowing (Watts, 2003).

It is interesting to note how on the one hand, policy can serve to direct and endorse social behaviour, while on the other it allows it to take its course. For example, policy may be proactive and prescriptive, or more laissez faire on questions of family formation and lifestyle (Carling, 2002). From the end of the Second World War up to and including the 1970s, policy was somewhat directive, with tax and benefit structures favouring the traditional nuclear family structure with an assumption of male breadwinner pattern of employment, as described above. However, in the 1980s, change was in evidence, and family policy took on a more neutral stance (Carling, 2002). This apparent relaxation of constraint, whilst to a significant extent economically driven, was interpreted by some as connected with the then Conservative government's view of the family as 'an unproblematic black box' best left to its own devices (Arber, 1993: 130). Even into the 1990s a sense of families needing to be responsible for their own and independent of the state remained pervasive. At the same time, concerns about children and families were on the increase, but there was little on offer to support the work of parenting. This was due in no small degree to an ideological positioning that the raising of children was a private responsibility rather than a social duty (Maclean, 2002).

4. 1990s motherhood: Background and context

In the later decades of the 20th century feminist discourse began to infiltrate women's thinking, as discussed in Chapter 2, encouraging them to challenge entrenched perceptions of their rights and roles in society. Second Wave feminism demanded women's liberation from reproductive and emotional 'bondage' (Firestone, 1979). Drawing on ideas from deconstruction analysis, feminist discourse emphasised gender flexibility and variability, challenging the notion that male and female roles were biologically predetermined:

... the required altruism for motherhood, previously accepted as a biological inevitability, part and parcel of a time-honoured framing of universal concepts and values around gender - the so-called 'essentialist' perspective - was called into question by women who were no longer prepared to accept what they perceived as its injustices.

(Ulanowsky, 1998: 242)

As indicated earlier, the 1970s generation of mothers had become alert to these ideas with a minority incorporating feminist perspectives into their thinking by challenging the idea of motherhood as central to their existence. However, whatever their response at an intellectual level, the practical choices of the majority did not substantially demonstrate the feminist credo until well into the 1980s. By then, women as mothers had become fully cognizant of their importance as persons too.

The variable employment patterns of mothers in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s illustrate the classic 'double-peaked' profile. Typically, for professional women this meant high employment levels prior to motherhood followed by low levels in their childbearing and childrearing years. The majority would then return to employment ten or more years later (Joshi, 2008). In the 1990s, however, statistical evidence demonstrated significant change

to this pattern, with no significant downturn in employment in the childbearing years, although many moved to part-time work once they became mothers (Crompton, 1997).

It is significant that the statistical rise in rates of women's employment between the early 1980s and late 1990s was *greatest* among mothers with children under five. In 1981, for example, only 24% of mothers with a child below the age of one were in work. By the year 2000, however, this had increased to 77%, albeit with a significant proportion working part-time (Melhuish, 2006: 46). A snapshot of the stated intentions of women taking part in National Childbirth Trust ante-natal classes between 1971 and 1990 affords empirical evidence of this trend. For example, in 1971, out of a typical group of ten expectant mothers, none planned to return to work before their child's first birthday; in 1981, 10% planned on returning; by 1990, however, this figure had risen to almost 50% (Ulanowsky, 1990).

Another feature of the 1990s was a rising trend in the employment rates of mothers with partners, bringing about a significant increase in what became known as the 'one-and-a-half breadwinner model' (Lewis, 2002: 53).

Equal rights and opportunities were an important feature of the feminist agenda with its aim of ensuring equality with men in the workplace and economic independence from them in the home. Women's commitment to self-determination was challenged by motherhood, however, when the essentially 'self-realising' philosophy of the individual came into conflict with the essentially 'other-centred' focus of motherhood. A central question to be confronted in the 1990s therefore was how and by what means these two positions might be satisfactorily reconciled. This is an issue considered in the section 'Personhood and parenthood' which appears towards the end of the chapter. For now,

some critical elements of policy which influenced women's perceptions of motherhood and its place in their lives during the 1990s are examined.

Once the Labour Government came into power in 1997, it implemented policies around work and families as part of its New Labour agenda, emphasising the concept of the working parent. Two critical elements of associated financial support, the New Deal for Lone Parents and Working Families Tax Credit, demonstrated an assumption that parents with dependent children would fulfil the twin obligations of employment and parenthood. A National Childcare strategy was implemented to this end, with considerable expansion of childcare places and financial support for working mothers towards meeting the costs. It is suggested that the 1998 Green Paper *Supporting Families* was the first policy document in Britain ever to address the needs of families in an integrated way, presenting a blueprint for all associated legislation which would follow (Barlow *et al.*, 2002; Maclean, 2002).

As discussed earlier, feminist discourse infers that if a woman is to choose her own life path she must seek independence from those elements in her life likely to impede her. Such constraints are identified, for example, as economic dependence on others and/or allowing personal circumstances and responsibilities to construct and constrain role and identity (Firestone, 1979). But as indicated above, when a woman becomes a mother, she is required to become more 'other-centred', undermining a commitment to choice and self-determination. This reality presented a critical dilemma for 1990s mothers.

5. Working Mothers

According to Hakim (1996), 'work' is any productive activity which produces goods and services, whereas 'employment' is work done for pay or profit (Hakim, 1996: 22). What follows is a consideration of the choices around paid work which the 1990s generation of

mothers felt constrained to make in their efforts to balance motherhood and employment. The discussion draws substantially on an analysis by Hakim (1996), but also on other perspectives, for example those of Walby (1986 and 1990) and Himmelweit (2000).

Mothers are involved with substantial amounts of all kinds of work, generally unpaid. Through the later years of the 20th century a discourse of valuing paid work over unpaid endeavour became increasingly evident (Ulanowsky, 1987). At the same time, paid work provided a means of ensuring independence and self-fulfilment for the modern woman (Tronto, 1993). As discussed in Chapter 1, in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s the Conservative government's focus on work was aimed at economic recovery *for* the state following a period of economic recession and industrial change and disruption. A parallel aim was for individuals to achieve economic independence *from* the state. Yet in the early 1990s ideological ambiguity became evident in these right-wing politics with respect to women as mothers. If women wanted to work there was generally work to be had. However, a Conservative government, committed to maintaining the traditional family of wage-earning father and home-based mother, appeared less than comfortable with a situation (in part of its own making) which encouraged women to leave home and children to the care of others and head for the workplace.

In opposition, the Labour party had largely ignored this ideological conundrum by maintaining value neutrality with respect to women and their roles. However, once in power they developed more defined employment and family policies based on a new economic liberalism. Their assumption was that individuals would make rational economic choices (Carling, 2002).

(i) *A critique of women as rational economic persons*

Notwithstanding this policy direction Hakim (1996) presents a challenging critique of the idea of mothers as rational economic persons. Her thesis is wide-ranging but primarily turns on an idea of gender difference with respect to women's choices around parenting and paid work. Hakim observed the work patterns of mothers as 'discontinuous', 'heterogeneous' and 'polarised' (Hakim, 1996). Evidence of her thesis is provided by a work pattern of the majority of 1990s mothers as intermittent and part-time, demonstrating diversity and polarity from the male pattern. As discussed above, mothers of the 1990s no longer presented the double-peaked pattern of employment manifest in earlier decades, yet neither did the majority resume their full-time careers once they became mothers (Crompton, 1997).

In her analysis Hakim (1996) considers the different employment motivations of women who were mothers and men who were fathers. She challenges a policy assumption that the gender gap between their relative motivations with respect to paid work was narrowing. Hakim's thesis indicates some agreement with Gilligan's (1982) theory of sex role attitudes as resistant to change. It is difficult for mothers to advance their economic case because the majority make decisions about paid work with an eye to their children's needs (Gilligan, 1982). Edwards *et al.* (2002) finds similarly that women's roles are constructed in relational rather than rational terms. As might be expected, critics of this analysis have been more than forthcoming. Walby (1986; 1990), for example, argues that the source of women's inferior positioning in the workplace, as in society as a whole, has its roots in structural patriarchy rather than in women's natural inclinations.

The reality that women as mothers do not achieve, sustain and build their careers to the levels of their male counterparts appears to be connected to factors beyond gender and

beyond patriarchy. During the 1990s the majority of mothers returned to the workplace within a year of having their first child, but most made the pragmatic choice that this would need to be part-time (Melhuish, 2006). There is evidence suggesting that part-time work undermines women's career prospects as well as reducing levels of economic reward. Whilst there has been gradual improvement in maternity leave since the 1970s, the question of whether women are afforded sufficient time out of the workplace to meet their needs as new mothers remains. Many will therefore compromise their careers by returning part-time in lower status jobs (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004; Watts, 2007a).

A lack of structural and financial support for mothers to remain at home for longer periods with their infant children contrasts with more favourable examples of parental leave from mainland Europe, as described by Letablier and Hartrais (1994). Comparatively speaking, there appears to be an undervaluing of parents and the parenting process in Britain. For example, whilst financial provision was made under the late 1990s Labour government to fund alternative care for young infants whilst mothers work through childminders, nurseries and the like, no funds are yet available for either parent to take on the care role if this is their choice, or to have the option of delegating paid childcare to family or friends. A woman's right to financial support to take time out to care for her own children may be considered an important feminist issue (Oakley, 1997).

(ii) Full-time parenting as a financial and practical option

Focusing on the issue of choice, several issues for policy emerge. One idea is whether some kind of parental remuneration or manipulation of the tax/benefit system could widen choice by making it economically possible for one parent to take time out to care for their infant children. The other parent, if in a partnership, could progress her/his career full-time. This would offer an alternative to the 'one-and-a-half breadwinner model', which overall

favours men (Lewis, 2002). The idea of a parent wage is not new. In her book, *Le Devoir Maternel*, published in France in 1911, Ida See argues for funded mothering (Badinter, 1980). Around the same time the idea of paying mothers was also explored in England by writer H.G. Wells in his *Modern Utopias*: 'Motherhood is a service to the state and a legitimate claim to a living' (cited in Lewis, 2002: 6).

More recently, others have argued both for a parenting wage and for the skills honed in the parenting role to be considered as legitimate experience when women re-enter employment (see Midgely and Hughes, 1983). Economically inactive work, like homemaking and childcare, Hakim (1996) agrees, should be classified alongside other work. Coddington (2002) argues that paying mothers to care for their own infant children would offer the combined benefits of compensating for their loss of economic independence and enhancing the value and status of motherhood within society as a whole. Radzik (2005) supports the case that motherhood is meaningful work for society and therefore deserving of appropriate reward on a justice/benefits scale. This, she claims, could be considered a form of feminist 'contractarianism' (Radzik, 2005: 52). It seems that if mothers were financially rewarded for the care work they provide, it would be easier to discern what their choices around motherhood and employment really are, at the same time as enabling them to go some way towards meeting them.

However, by the 1990s, the reality of limited economic choice for women as mothers meant combining employment and parenting in pragmatic ways, often requiring significant compromise in both roles. Becker's (1991) theory of personal capital highlights the ways in which this compromise can cause mothers to economise on the time and effort put into paid employment. For this reason, many seek employment in less demanding jobs (Hakim, 1996). In summary, Becker (1991) develops an efficiency point about family life/work

operations working best if one partner focuses primarily on paid employment, the other on home and family. In a later examination of Becker's argument, Himmelweit (2000) recognises how a separation of roles can indeed maximise personal capital. However, it is clear that several issues and complexities must be addressed by both partners if they are to achieve an equitable and satisfactory compromise in this regard.

(iii) Combining motherhood and employment: Evidence of women's diminished status

Part-time work has been an increasing trend in the employment patterns of professional women across several European countries as a way of balancing work and family life (ISER, 2006). Recent research from the United States indicates that a lower proportion of mothers returned to full time employment in 2007 than was the case in 1997 (PEW, 2007).

If a woman combines work and motherhood there are several factors for her to consider, usefully highlighted by Ridgeway and Correll (2004), who observe that the mere fact of becoming a mother can significantly diminish a woman's status in the workplace. Overall, judgements about her competence in her professional role and her potential for positions for authority are negatively affected when a woman returns to work following time out to have a baby. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) conclude that this finding is more significant than can be explained by the issue of gender alone, but arises from a common belief that a woman cannot be a good worker and a good mother at the same time. Skills learned through the parenting role are not acknowledged in the workplace. Negative perceptions, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) discovered, are more prevalent in settings where the majority of co-workers are non-mothers, that is, either males or childless women. More recent work by Watts (2007a) endorses this finding, indicating a blurring of women's status when they attempt to achieve a work/life balance. Gimson (2008: 7) concludes that: 'When somebody recruits a parent, they think of the negatives rather than the positives'.

It is interesting to note that fatherhood does not appear to diminish a man's status in the workplace, and may even increase it. However, should a man become the chief carer for his children and display even small behavioural clues that his parental role is impinging on his work role, for example by taking time out to care for sick children or leaving work early, then, like a mother, he will be judged negatively in work performance terms. Notwithstanding this fact, (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004: 695) conclude that a father's status does not fall as low as that of a mother in similar circumstances, due to his 'status advantage' of being a man.

Whilst mothers may be afforded minimal respect in the workplace, levels of respect and attention for non-working mothers are even lower (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). The 'invisibility' of motherhood is highlighted in the case of Ann Crittenden, who, prior to having her baby, had been a top international journalist. As a full-time mother, however, Crittenden found she had 'shed status like a snake'. She recalled being stopped in a New York street and asked: 'Didn't you *used* to be Anne Crittenden?' (cited in Ridgeway and Correll, 2004: 689).

(iv) Advantages for mothers of part-time and flexible work patterns

Notwithstanding the drawbacks of part-time work outlined above, this is often the most pragmatic solution for mothers needing to dovetail work and care roles. Research by Collins (1987), for example, found a congruence between part-time work and motherhood. For employers too, the literature highlights how flexible contracts may be viewed as a 'win-win' situation, affording inbuilt flexibility to meet the requirements of a fluctuating business environment (Wilkinson, 1994). Additionally, with respect to a mother's mental and emotional wellbeing, research by Frangoulis (1998) affirms the benefits of part-time

work for mothers of young infants. However, as discussed above, such arrangements can affect their positioning in the workplace and be exploitative when part-time contracts lack employment protection and longer-term benefits (Crompton, 1997). Crompton also highlights the ways in which part-time work undermines a woman's chances of financial independence from her partner, should she wish it.

Notwithstanding these factors, statistically the part-time work option is taken up by an increasing number of mothers, whether or not, everything being equal, this would be their choice. Between 1971 and 1996, for example, the number of part-time jobs in the UK economy doubled, meaning that by the mid-1990s 45% of women were engaged in part-time work, with mothers clearly stating that they would put up with less interesting work and lower pay 'for the sake of the children' (Crompton, 1997: 22). Nevertheless, as discussed, additional to a loss of financial security and other benefits, women do pay a 'quality penalty' in terms of job satisfaction by going part-time (Crompton, 1997: 49).

With regard to flexibility, the literature records that 'family-friendly' working arrangements during the 1990s continued to be dependent on the whims of individual employers. Generally speaking, occupations in the public sector, those involving a high proportion of women and those with a strong trade union representation are recorded as more likely to make family-friendly arrangements available. These arrangements, however, are more usually available to highly educated women employees occupying higher status positions (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003). However, this finding is contested when evidence is gathered from male-dominated occupational sectors (Watts, 2007a).

(v) *Recent developments*

Whilst not yet favourably comparable with opportunities for women in some countries of continental Europe, the situation in Britain regarding paid maternity leave arrangements from the later 1970s has been one of steady improvement. It is interesting to speculate on the extent to which this resulted from EU pressure to bring the UK into line or pressure from women themselves demanding a more adequate work/life balance. Longer periods of maternity leave have been associated with better psychological adjustment and overall more positive outcomes for mothers (Wanee, 1999). From 2007, statutory maternity leave was 39 weeks with entitlement increased to one year, regardless of how long a woman has worked for an employer. A further advantageous factor is that during the period of maternity leave women intending to resume their careers are able to engage in up to ten 'Keeping in Touch' workplace days, without the risk of losing statutory maternity pay. These new arrangements are part of the new Work and Families Act operational for women becoming mothers after April 1, 2007 (Womack, 2006). Of interest is movement in EU policy towards a standardisation of maternity leave arrangements across all member states (Hakim 1999).

There is a growing incidence of professional women waiting ever longer to become mothers: for example into the new millennium only 2% of female graduates had a child before they were 30 years of age (Brown, 2004). In their 30s, prior to motherhood, women are defined, and define themselves, by their work role. Additionally, it is reasonable to suppose that a greater number of years spent building a career towards senior positions with high remuneration will increase a woman's reluctance to relinquish status and economic benefits. Further to this, a longer period in work prior to motherhood arguably results in a greater sense of professional loss when a woman becomes a mother and leaves fallow a self-perception afforded by her career (Parker, 1995).

(vi) *Working mothers: Summary*

The question of work and motherhood was initially addressed with reference to Hakim's (1996) analysis, which emphasises how women's preferences differ from those of their male counterparts. An opposing perspective was then presented (Walby, 1986; 1990). Post-1997 Labour government policy in some ways misrepresented the needs and preferences of mothers, by making an assumption that the majority would prefer funding for childcare while they returned to the workplace (Carling, 2002; Edwards *et al.*, 2002). The option of support for full-time parenting was then considered as a means of opening up choice whilst maximising human capital (Becker, 1991; Himmelweit, 2000). Some negative factors of mothers making the pragmatic choice to work part-time were highlighted with reference to work by Crompton (1997) and Ridgeway and Correll (2004). This developed into a brief examination of the low status of women as mothers, both in and out of the workplace. Research that looked at the emotional and psychological benefits of part-time work for mothers was cited with reference to studies by Collins (1987) and Frangoulis (1998). The duration of maternity leave was observed to be steadily growing (Hakim, 1999; Womack, 2006). However, the challenge for mothers to find childcare suitable to their needs and those of their infant children remained. It is to this question that I now turn, with consideration first of childcare in a context of children's needs.

6. The needs of children

*Children's needs ... are understood by all of us
through the prism of our gendered and familial
desires and identities*

(Featherstone, 1997: 1)

Some argue that a focus on children's needs presents mothers as merely the 'servicers' of those needs (Featherstone, 1997: 9). However, the ways that women perceive and construct motherhood in their lives places the needs of their infant children at the forefront of their considerations. The discussion which follows looks at this question primarily through developmental perspectives, including attachment theory (Bowlby, 1953 and 1982). The focus then moves from children back to their mothers in consideration of the effects of motherhood on women. Afterwards there is consideration of different childcare arrangements in a range of settings before the discussion once again returns to the parenthood/personhood tension in women's lives. A consideration of the extent to which motherhood was socially constructed in the separate contexts of the 1970s and 1990s concludes the discussion.

The stage of childhood in focus here is infancy, a period defined from birth to around 30 months (Winnicott, 1979) and characterised by a child's almost total dependency on her/his caregiver(s). At this stage a child's requirements are considerable and intense, necessitating high levels of empathy and skill to achieve synchronization between a child's needs and how these might be met (Morgan, 1996). Sensitive care is especially critical when levels of spoken communication are inadequate for a child to articulate its needs. It is noteworthy that the word 'infant' derives from 'infans', which means 'not talking' (Winnicott, 1979: 40).

Whilst some writers claim that 'childhood' is a cultural invention (see, for example, Stainton Rogers, 2003) certain needs persist across time and setting. Additional to the primary survival requirements of food, warmth, shelter and protection, other factors are critical if a child intellectually, emotionally and socially is to flourish (Whitfield, 1983). Evidence from the neurosciences highlights the impact of early infant care on later

development (Montgomery, 2003). For this reason a holistic approach which considers a child's mental and emotional health as well as its physical needs has become an established canon of early infant care. Additionally, infant care, whilst contexted in the present, must be future-oriented, with the notion of the child as a 'growing action system' kept constantly in mind (Pollack, 1993:5).

The theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1953 and 1982) has been influential in this regard. This argues that sound attachment to a recognised and reliable caregiver, usually but not necessarily the mother, builds trust and security, a sense of self-worth and a positive life view in the child. Longer term, a securely attached child develops a sense of competence and resilience in adversity because it has 'psychosomatic integration' and 'ego strength' (Winnicott, 1960: 593). For Fraiberg (1977: 56) early care relationships are an 'initiation into the human fraternity'.

Attachment behaviour generally manifests around halfway through the first year of a child's life, continuing into the second year and beyond (Kraemer, 1996; Aldgate and Jones, 2006). For this reason, inappropriate or insecure care arrangements during this critically sensitive early period, it is argued, may have later, negative, consequences (Morris, 1987; Biddulph, 2006). However, by the age of around 30 months a child is more articulate and more resilient; it no longer exists only in the present, so the trauma of separation from the mother or principle carer is unlikely to be experienced as a 'significant break in life's continuity' (Phillips, 1988: 21).

Attachment theory has not been short of its critics who have argued that the role of the mother has been overemphasised in the process, perpetuating a biological determinism which, for centuries, has limited her life to 'kinder, kuche and kirche' (Morris, 1987: 158).

Other literature is more reassuring, making the point that Bowlby's analysis of attachment was about the *nature* of care, not who would supply it (Rutter and O Connor, 1999; Aldgate and Jones, 2006). However, it has been observed that some parents and professionals remain resistant to attachment theory (Belsky, 1988).

Alongside a need to set in place appropriate early care, the need for an adequate allowance of space and flexibility in children's lives is highlighted in the literature (Whitfield, 1983; Williams, 2005). In an increasingly time-poor environment, time each day for children to follow their natural inclinations and just to be themselves appears to be at a premium. There is concern especially for middle class children in this regard, from observations that their lives are increasingly constrained by timetables and structured activities. The end result can be that children are forever going somewhere and constantly 'doing' and 'achieving'. In summary, when there is diminishing space for serendipity in parents' lives, space for serendipity in children's lives may also be at a premium. It seems clear that no one recipe for meeting children's needs has been found to be entirely flawless and reliable. However, one quality important for successful care, drawn out of rigorous research and practical experience, is that children require space to just *be* children, within a context of a 'non-possessive warmth and the willingness and ability for parents to take trouble' (Whitfield 1983: 9).

Through time, clear articulation of children's more subtle needs has been unstable because definitions often reflect the intellectual currency and social values of their times (Featherstone, 1997; Aldgate and Jones, 2006; Sunderland, 2006). Yet for all that, time-tested folk wisdom has been found to provide the essential bedrock of parenting knowledge about children's needs, presenting as it does, 'a natural experiment of the human race over countless generations' (Fraiberg, 1977: 6). However, a late-modern desire

to feel liberated from the ideological shackles of the past can demonstrate hubris arrogantly neglectful of experience (Hardyment, 1983; Heelas, 1996). However, it must be acknowledged that new information about children and their needs is conveniently available in ever increasing amounts through a burgeoning supply of print and electronic media which parents may, and do, draw upon.

7. Motherhood: Effects and constraints

Care is a central feature of motherhood. Research into the lives of women as carers highlights the ways in which caring can generate personal change, registered as in the nature of an 'epiphany', changing perceptions of both their inner and their outer selves (Chamberlayne and King, 1997: 605). For example, Lappen (1993) recorded the mothers in her research as recording higher levels of compassion in themselves. However, some might interpret this feature as oppressive for women, being constituent of an inherent biological determinism concerning women's roles and positioning (see, for example, Chodorow, 1978; Firestone, 1979; Oakley, 1997). In summary, whilst motherhood affords significant opportunity for personal development, the role can never be a contractual operation of the self-interested kind (Held, 1993).

Before embarking on motherhood women are urged to consider its social and psychological dimensions (Boulton, 1983). Whatever her generational context, when she knows she is to become a mother a woman mentally and emotionally, at some level, engages with what is to come. The literature suggests that the age and stage of life for a woman's first pregnancy is significant here. In the 1970s, for the majority of middle class women this was in their 20s; as the years progressed to the 1990s, however, this was more likely to be their 30s, as discussed. Of interest is that the age of 30 in itself has been found

to be a significant life transition, with motherhood at that time recorded as generating higher parental stress and lower parental satisfaction than at other ages (Bower-McCartney, 1998).

A woman's first pregnancy at any age represents an important transition when 'significant personal, social and biological changes coincide', to prepare for her 'future mother self' (Smith, 1999: 294). Bodily changes in pregnancy begin the process of a woman's adjustment from a state of 'who I am' to 'who I will be' as she 'shifts some of her sense of self on to the baby that is growing within her' (Winnicott, 1979: 53). Even when well-prepared, the birth of a baby is revealed in research as presenting significant identity disruption for new mothers (Weaver and Ussher, 1997). Before they had their babies, several subjects had believed that motherhood was simply a process of adding one more role to their repertoire. However, once their babies were born, the research revealed how the mothers found the role to be world-transforming and all-encompassing (Weaver and Ussher, 1997).

Adopting a full-time care role for a significant other has been noted as requiring identity reconstruction (Chamberlayne and King (1997). The relationship between 'role' and 'identity' requires attention in this regard. Briefly, a role is a behavioural pattern expected of occupants of a position such as motherhood (Argyle, 1967). 'Identity', on the other hand, presents a more central concept of self (Burns, 1979). (Schechtman (2005: 1) usefully refers to Lock's definition of identity as a 'continued flow of psychic life'. In more recent times, however, a greater fluidity of identity based on 'shifting and non-absolute foundations' has been fore-grounded. This fluidity is linked to modern progressiveness, yet also uncertainty (Giddens, 1991). More stable notions of identity, on the other hand, are linked to traditionalism, essentialism and oppression (Heelas, 1996: 6). However, it is

noted that all conceptual interpretations (including psychological ones) can be appreciated, at some level, as 'constructed', not least in more recent times by the influence of globalisation (Heelas, 1996).

As indicated, motherhood can cause disturbance to a person's psychic flow; at the same time, motherhood is recorded as the most fulfilling role that women can experience (Kitzinger, 2004). Conversely, mothering can be an isolated and oppressive experience being responsible for 'preserving, sustaining, repairing and mending both the physical and emotional fabric of life' (Grimshaw, 1986: 242). As Midgely and Hughes (1983: 71) pithily express it: 'There is nothing like being shut in a small flat on a rainy day with a set of whining toddlers for distancing the angel story'. Such circumstances are recorded as leading to post-natal depression rather than, as was previously thought, its cause being attributed solely to a hormonal/chemical imbalance (James, 2007). Here is presented a model of social effects operating in parallel with biological ones. Additionally, it is pointed out that whilst motherhood can be an isolating experience for women, mothering performance is fairly constantly exposed to the judgement of others (Miller, 1998; Thomson *et al.*, 2008).

It is clear that assuring adequate and committed care for her child places enormous responsibility on a mother, especially in the early days. For a child, the mother figure is unique and irreplaceable. For a mother, however, total absorption in her infant 'lasts for a certain length of time and then gradually loses significance' (Winnicott, 1960: 594). Chodorow (1978: 68-9) agrees, observing how, for a mother, a child may well be replaced 'by another infant, by other people and activities'. In recognition of women's requirement of a life beyond motherhood Chodorow (1978) suggests that a woman's relationship with her child should ideally be set within the contexts of time and situation. In the 1990s an

early return to the workplace was one way that this might happen, with mothers using substitute care for their infant children.

8. Childcare

In the later years of the 20th century a woman's rights to personal fulfilment and self-fulfilment in roles beyond motherhood were increasingly recognised, as discussed.

Additionally, economic pressures on mothers to work triggered a growing requirement for substitute care (Melhuish, 2006). Decisions about childcare are ideally made in the light of a child's specific needs and level of maturity, and what follows is a discussion of some options for childcare with this in mind. Informal options, un-inspected and unfunded, are not considered here, as evidence suggests that these are rarely used by women in the social groups under consideration (SOC, 2000), due primarily to the geographic distance between middle class women and their families of origin (Midgely and Hughes, 1995).

(i) *The development of provision*

Childcare provision is a fast-moving and complex area (Melhuish, 2006). However, until the 1990s Britain had the lowest level of state-provided childcare in Europe, meaning that substantial numbers of mothers who needed or wanted to work relied almost entirely on the private market or on personal networks (Melhuish and Moss, 1991). Prior to the National Childcare Strategy implemented in 1998, childcare costs amounted to nearly a quarter of the weekly earnings of a mother with a child under five (Ward *et al.*, 1996). In earlier times, state provision had been limited to children with special requirements or those whose mothers were needed to fulfil specific employment requirements such as in wartime, as discussed (Storkey, 1985). Once a particular need was satisfied, however, state provision was cut back (BBC Radio 4, 'Childhood', 27.10.06).

During the 1970s, many mothers with preschool children became involved in informal care and early education activities through playgroups. The Pre-school Playgroups Association (PPA) was established in 1970 to oversee local networks which by then numbered eight thousand. The PPA was supported by mothers, largely in a volunteer capacity, and underpinned by an ethic of 'intellectual improvement, self-help and neighbourliness' (Rose, 1989: 194). For home-bound mothers playgroups transformed the often lonely and mundane business of rearing children into an officially approved and socially valued experience (Rose, 1989). In the later 1980s and 1990s, however, women's significantly increased participation in the labour market required a more substantive model of childcare than was available in the limited hours of the pre-school playgroup model. Yet there remained a paucity of state childcare provision, notwithstanding the fact that two million *more* women were involved in the workplace than was the case in the early 1970s (Melhuish and Moss, 1991).

A mid-1990s survey amongst mothers revealed over half as expressing a preference for care by a partner or relative, with the second highest preference being for work-based crèches, available at that time to only 2% of working women (ESDS, 1995). However, at government level, the preferences of mothers were largely ignored when childcare became increasingly professionalised (Midgely and Hughes, 1995). From 1998, funding was made available for government-approved provision only, bringing the level in 2005 to 70% of funding up to a maximum cost of £175 a week for one child and £300 a week for two children, yet higher earning parents were unlikely to get any financial help (HM Revenue and Customs, 2005).

In addition to the issue of cost, who pays and to whom, in many respects childcare has been and remains a contentious area. The antecedents of modern childcare provision are

considered in some detail by Bax *et al.* (1990) and Melhuish and Moss (1991). The following discussion draws primarily on Bax *et al.* (1990) beginning with a discussion of childminders. In the 1970s childminding was distinctive for its informality, though in the 1980s initiatives were underway to improve its status and quality. Bax *et al.* (1990) present an interesting statistic: in the early 1980s a childminder's pay would be in the region of 50p to £1 per hour for a 40 hour week. In the light of this low level of remuneration it is perhaps unsurprising that less than a quarter of newly registered childminders attended training courses, and a substantive number of unrecorded childminders had no training at all (Bax *et al.*, 1990). However, the early 1990s saw a gradual professionalisation of childminders and other providers through the processes of registration, training and inspection.

Like childminding, earlier models of group care in day nurseries present a significant contrast with later developments. Up to the mid-1990s, for example, day-care had been organised and inspected by Social Services with a focus on provision for high priority groups of children, for example those deemed at risk of neglect or abuse and/or with special needs. Emphasis was on physical rather than emotional or educational input and liaison with parents was kept to a minimal level. This is in significant contrast with the later 'partnership' philosophy of care provision developed through initiatives like Sure Start, launched in 1998. Within New Labour's National Childcare Strategy (1998), training, assessment and inspection all came under the umbrella of the Department for Education, reflecting a change in emphasis from care to education.

(ii) The later 1990s: An increase in group care for young infants

For children from about 30 months of age the clear benefits of group care are undisputed. Socialisation, stimulation and learning skills development are recognised advantages for

children when delivered in high quality pre-school learning/care environments (Bruce, 1987). However, there is a concern, recently revisited, of some negative indicators for young, preverbal, infants being cared for in group settings when one-to-one care would be more appropriate (Biddulph, 2006). Children's different levels of adaptation to group care are recorded by Leach (2003) from her observation that young infants take considerably longer to adapt to group care than older children. Results from other research by Melhuish (2006) indicate higher levels of antisocial behaviour among under-threes who spend *extensive* periods of time in group care, than for the population as a whole. For under one-year-olds especially, there are indicators that group care 'exposes children to stress and puts excessive demands on their ability to cope' (Hwang, 2006: 87).

Prior to the 1990s the childcare debate focused on issues such as the appropriateness of different models of childcare for children at different developmental stages (Bax, *et al.*, 1990; Melhuish and Moss, 1991). In the later 1990s there appeared to be a shift in the focus of concern from the child receiving care to those providing it. A key objective was to raise the level of trained staff. However, in some settings there is a regular staff turnover of between 30 and 40 percent. Arguably, this means that a young infant's requirement for committed care from a limited number of individuals, as discussed, cannot be assured, whatever the qualifications and quality of the staff (Biddulph, 2006). A further worrying point is that even well-intentioned professionals working in nurseries may be encouraged to operate in more emotionally detached styles than is beneficial for young infants (Rutter and O'Connor, 1999). A double bind for staff in nursery settings trying to provide sensitive and appropriate care for young infants, yet required to avoid closeness to individual children is recognised (Hodges, 1996).

Recent developments towards more individualised models of care to assure greater emotional security for babies and young infants in group care settings are to be welcomed, though staff illness, annual leave and staff turnover are realities which continue to undermine such efforts (James, 2007). It is observed that the achievement of appropriate adult to child ratios, staff quality and staff stability in nurseries may require levels of funding more costly than paying individual parents to care for their children themselves (Biddulph, 2006). Research conducted in 2003 by MORI (cited in Gimson, 2008) reveals that parents want more choice in how they might share a substantive part of caring for their infant children between themselves at home.

For reasons of reliability and the value added element of their children being in an educational setting, the majority of middle class mothers continue to opt for care in a nursery in preference to a childminder despite emerging concerns about group provision for young infants. In this regard, whilst stability, continuity and predictability have long been the watchwords for early infant care, current practice in Britain might be seen to mirror that of the United States a generation ago. At that time, Fraiberg (1977: 120) observed that the infant care arm of children's services might be seen to 'impair' the development of young infants, requiring another arm of services later to step in and 'repair' the damage done. Yet for all that, Morgan (1996) notes that claims made for childcare in Britain have been so extravagant as to make parental care 'look like a poor substitute' (1996: 17). Conversely, alongside a national policy of expansion for professional childcare, other social policy has had the somewhat different aim of developing and supporting parenting capacity, rather than children being moved out of the home into professional care settings (Rose, 2001). The apparent contradiction of these two approaches can only be explained by childcare policy being subject to both 'ideology and labour market pressures' (Melhuish, 2006: 60).

The final strand of childcare under consideration is that of work-based crèches. Whilst this is the second most preferred option after care by a family member (ESDS, 1995), it is not widely available. In practical terms, a work-based crèche saves considerable travel time and energy for a working parent and gives reassurance that, in case of need, she/he is on hand. Work-based crèches can therefore assist in the achievement of a more adequate work/life balance. Addressing the needs of their employees who are parents, it is claimed, can have positive spinoffs for businesses too (Wilkinson, 1994). A contented family life is a benefit underestimated by employers, in the opinion of Wilkinson (1994), who cites research from the New York Families and Work Institute which concludes that a 'well-developed hinterland' in employees' lives can serve to enhance rather than detract from work performance (Wilkinson, 1994: 16). Wilkinson cites further evidence of the high rate of resignations resulting from stress among women in managerial positions as twice that of their male counterparts (Wilkinson, 1994: 32). Throughout the 1990s increasing numbers of women rejected more demanding career positions in favour of part-time, lower-status jobs, as discussed (Crompton, 1997). Some mothers have achieved flexibility by working for themselves; during the 1990s, it is noteworthy that more than twice as many women as men in Britain were recorded as having set up their own business (Greer, 1999b).

(iii) Childcare: Final reflections

With regard to the current situation Williams (2005) comments that society seems to have swung from one 'unworkable situation' to another. Pre-feminism, 1970s mothers were 'suffocating in the suburbs', a generation later, the majority of infant children spend their time in situations equally 'oppressive' to fit in with parents' busy lives (Williams, 2005: 214). The Welfare to Work policies of New Labour, whilst in some ways correcting passivity and inaction, Williams adds, have sent a message to the population that

‘economic productivity is where we all ought to end up’ irrespective of our ‘nurturing and forming’ responsibilities (Williams, 2005: 214). However, James (2007) cautions that substitute care, in whatever setting, affords a better option for a young child than being at home with a depressed and isolated biological mother.

The family-employment relationship may be considered as at the intersection of two areas of policy implementation: the sociology of work and the sociology of the family, each having its own separate frame of reference (Letablier and Hartrais, 1994). However, to date, it is indicated that an appropriate reconciliation in Britain between the two remains elusive (Ward *et al.*, 1996; Carling, 2002; Edwards *et al.*, 2002; Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Brannen, *et al.*, 2004). Conversely, some countries on the European mainland appear to have established a more adequate reconciliation. Examples include opportunities for extended periods of funded parental leave and a broader range of childcare models, allowing for greater parental choice (see especially Barbier, 1994; Bjornberg, 1994 and Daune-Richard, 1994). Throughout the 1990s a growing number of mothers in Britain indicated a need and a wish to work but equally needed to feel confident that they could access childcare appropriate to their own and their children’s needs. A satisfactory integration between work and family life for parents and their children may be a costly enterprise for the state in the short term; however, adequate state investment is required if both short and longer-term benefits for mothers and their children are to be assured.

9. Conclusion: Personhood and parenthood

The concluding discussion returns to the concept of personhood. In this research, personhood is conceived as the capacity of a woman to realise her individual needs and rights in the context of motherhood. Broadly speaking, the 1970s was revealed as not conducive to women making choices about how they might realise personhood in

motherhood. In contrast, the 1990s social context in some ways afforded women as mothers a sense of entitlement (evident in late modernity), to choose her own life path. However, the realisation of personal aspiration in both motherhood and other roles was revealed as problematic.

The first three chapters of this thesis have presented detailed discussion of the critical theoretical perspectives important for consideration in the research. Examination of time-specific discourses revealed the changing positioning of motherhood in women's lives through time. For example, motherhood in the 1970s was revealed as home-bound and full time for the majority of middle-class women. 1990s motherhood, on the other hand, was experienced in a context of tension between motherhood and paid work. In this regard, discourse focusing on women as persons was revealed as failing to find appropriate resolution for women as mothers.

Whilst western liberal democracies have increasingly promoted individual freedom and choice, as outlined in Chapter 1, the literature revealed how motherhood, even into the later years of the 20th century, has remained constrained and constructed. In a sense, both discourse and policy continued to promote particular ways that women should think, feel and behave in relation to motherhood, undermining individual agency (Burns, 1979; Wiersma, 1992; Markus *et al.*, 1997). Yet it is revealed that even the stories we tell ourselves *about* ourselves are culturally embedded (see, for example, Busby's 2004 study of new parents).

As discussed in Chapter 2, from the late 18th century into the final two decades of the 20th, middle class motherhood for the majority was full-time and realised in the context of the nuclear family. As the dominant regulator of personal life, the home was judged to be the

critical source of all that was good and bad, for children, with mothers bearing significant responsibility (Schaffer, 1977; Ruddick, 1990). However, this view was seen as problematic (Butler, 1997). Through the second half of the 20th century the lives of children and their mothers came increasingly under state regulation being ever more subject to the professional gaze of social, health and educational services (Rose, 1989).

From the establishment of the post-war Welfare State, childhood, in effect, was shaped not through the family alone but through a combination of parental effort and statutory input, rendering modern childhood the most intensely governed sector of existence (Rose, 1989).

Individual life in the first half of the 20th century was viewed as a mix of conformity and existentialism (Tillich, 1952: 88). However, a late-modern emphasis in western society on an individual's right to self-fulfilment became increasingly recognised as somewhat in the nature of a 'universal zeitgeist' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 3). It has been argued that individuals have a right to choose their own life paths, unconstrained by tradition or custom, for 'every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality' (Rose, 1989: 226-7). However, whilst freedom from the constraints of roles as constructed by others for many has been achieved, motherhood, in some respects, remains the exception.

In summary, the majority of middle class mothers in the 1970s had space and opportunity to fully engage with motherhood, but the home-based existences of a significant number were recorded as dull and unfulfilling (Friedan, 1963). Their lives lacked the structure, personal achievement and social collegiality of the workplace enjoyed by the next generation. At its negative extreme, home-bound motherhood was viewed as 'ghettoised and degrading' for women who felt 'restricted from acting on anything except inert materials like dust and food' (Rich, 1976: 38). Whilst 1970s mothers had sufficient time,

space and energy to fully engage with motherhood, and many had welcomed this, opportunities to retain personhood appear to have been limited.

A somewhat contrasting picture of the 1990s generation emerged. For them, motherhood in parallel with paid work, while stressful to manage, held the promise of both stimulation and remuneration. Described as 'the first post-equality cohort', this generation was less gender-confined than women of previous generations (Wilkinson, 1994: 19). Personal aspiration featured high on their agendas, likewise status, image, consumption and hedonism (Wilkinson, 1994). For all that, these mothers, as earlier generations, continued to be frustrated in their realisation of both inner and outer routes to fulfilment by having their choices constrained by circumstance. Mothers as relentless careerists, or engaged for a substantial number of years in only mother-work, it seems, are both minority positions, yet, through time, the dominant ideologies of motherhood and the social and fiscal policies influencing its realisation have failed to reflect this.

The many influences and constraints on the role perceptions of these two generations of mothers are expressed diagrammatically (see Appendix I). Chapter 4, *Methodology*, which follows begins with consideration of some issues important in the planning of the empirical research with 27 mothers. The fieldwork processes are then described and discussed in detail.

Chapter 4

Methodology

The researcher is able to observe the processes through which individuals jointly construct their own realities and make sense of themselves as a group who share common values and ways of understanding themselves and their world.

(Munday, 2006: 95)

1. Introduction

Perceptions of motherhood may be viewed as cultural representations of time and situation. As discussed, this research aimed to reveal the role perceptions of two generations of women who mothered in the 1970s and 1990s. The literature has revealed how these two decades present features of noteworthy socioeconomic and ideological contrast in ways salient to motherhood.

The aim of the empirical strand of the research was to engage with the actual experience of a sample of mothers from each generation to reveal the nature and extent of this contrast. Secondly, at both generational and individual levels, the fieldwork sought to identify the extent to which personal agency was evident in the ways the participants had perceived motherhood and constructed it in their lives. This required interrogation of data to identify any conflict between the women's time-specific discourses and the personal choices they made. For motherhood is a profoundly embodied and socially complex process, as discussed in earlier chapters. Additionally, the empirical data, it was hoped, would reveal the nature of any tension between the subjects' sense of supremacy as persons (their 'personhood') with the practical demands and constraints on them as parents. The idea of

‘personhood’ is informed by 17th century philosopher John Locke’s definition, as a person asserting their right to express their identity and fulfil himself, or herself, as an individual (Locke, 1961).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the aims of the research were distilled into two questions:

- i) Are there significant differences between the role perceptions of women who became mothers in the 1970s and those who became mothers a generation later, in the 1990s?
- (ii) Are differences discernable between these two generations of women with respect to the strength of personal agency each demonstrated in their formulation of motherhood?

A study of this kind presents particular challenges in research design because of its complexity. One complicating factor was the objective of accessing the ideas and personal experiences of two separate generations of mothers. There are several methodological influences and systems which may be drawn upon for researching personal experience. This chapter, written as a reflective account, begins by discussing some of these. It then moves on to justify the practical decision making for collecting and analysing data within a qualitative framework. Afterwards, the issue of finding a suitable data source is discussed in addition to consideration of some broader issues around accessing participants for research and the possible generalisability of any resulting data. Rationales for the methods eventually selected for both data collection and analysis are presented, along with an explanation of why the fieldwork was conducted in two stages. This is preceded by a discussion of some important ethical issues for the researcher to contemplate.

The literature indicates three separate but inter-related elements for consideration when planning research. These are: ‘methodology’, which concerns the whole research process, including its philosophical and theoretical underpinnings; ‘methods’, covering techniques

and tools used for gathering the data; and 'epistemology', the nature of the gathered data and how it might be analysed to ensure adequacy and legitimacy (Harding, 1987; Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Silverman, 2001; Takhar, 2003). As will become apparent in the discussion which follows, a range of traditions and methodologies gave rise to a particular synthesis for the research.

As explained earlier, in a study of this scale it was not possible to seek representation from *all* social groups. Early searches in the literature suggested that it is high-functioning women in particular who experience a tension between motherhood and other life roles (Oakley, 1974; Davies and Welch, 1986; Crompton, 1997). The decision was made therefore to research the role perceptions of mothers who broadly fitted Social Classes 1 and 2 and 3, as identified by the National Statistics Standard Occupational Classification (SOC, 2000), because these categories include high-functioning occupations as discussed.

The research questions underpinned the research design which paid attention to a range of interconnected issues, including researcher positioning. Whatever the methodology eventually adopted for the fieldwork, its suitability for drawing out the subjects' past experiences constituent within their present-time reconstructions and interpretations was important.

2. Early considerations

Some elements of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research design are discussed next, highlighting the specific features of each with respect to their suitability for a project of this nature. Then some theories of human behaviour relevant to the research are considered, including features of the feminist research perspective.

(i) A quantitative or qualitative approach?

Making a choice between quantitative and qualitative research methodologies is generally dependent upon the nature of what a researcher is trying to investigate. To a lesser extent, the choice can also depend on whether a researcher prefers to work with naturally occurring data or with data more constrained within a quantitative design (Silverman, 2001). The literature also indicates that a qualitative approach may be favoured if the researcher has a preference for an inductive, hypothesis-generating approach rather than with one which has the aim of hypothesis testing (Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Silverman, 2001).

The broad aim of this research was to study the phenomenon of motherhood in evidence at two different points in time. Early searches in the literature identified some possible drawbacks with utilising quantitative methods for this purpose. One was that a quantitative approach may not adequately reveal the meanings attached to the lived experience of individuals, their engagement with each other and with the wider world (Tesch, 1990). A second drawback identified was that quantitative approaches can sometimes lead a researcher to settle on variables for an enquiry which are 'most easily quantifiable, rather than what is most theoretically important' (Cook and Fonow, 1990: 27; see also the discussion of questionnaires by Moser and Calton, 2004).

Mason (1996) explains that a qualitative approach is better suited to drawing out people's complex multi-layered experiences from their subjective accounts. Others confirm the view that qualitative research is about interpretation, the analysis process uncovering, or explicating, meaning from text (Tesch, 1990). A warning is given, that the accounts of research subjects must not be considered as in the nature of 'fact', for these accounts are, in essence, subjective realities (Silverman, 2001). For this reason, qualitative researchers may be described as inhabiting the not unproblematic border 'between reality and

representation' (Silverman, 2001: 39). Whichever is decided upon, the literature is clear that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies must each be subject to the same rigorous tests and standards applied to any research enterprise (Silverman, 2001).

As the aim of the research was to uncover the essence and complexity of the multi-layered worlds of the research subjects : their experiences, points of view, motivations, worldviews, opinions, values, attitudes and symbolic constructs, a qualitative approach was indicated.

The decades of the 1970s and 1990s had been purposefully chosen as having potential to reveal contexts for motherhood of significant sociological contrast, as discussed in earlier chapters, with reference to the literature (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1976; Hakim, 1996; Crompton, 1997; Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Brannen *et al.*, 2004). At the same time, for the purpose of data gathering, it was judged that neither period would be so far in the distant past as to be inaccessible to memory.

The nature of the data, it was hoped, would reveal the mothers' generational responses to their socio-economic and ideological contexts. Separate and diverse discourses of motherhood were expected to dominate and recede in relation to time and circumstance as the research proceeded. With respect to motherhood, there would be some continuity and some change. Careful attention to the voices of individual women would be paramount for, as Birch (1998: 175) reminds us: 'It is through the individual's autobiography that her relationship to public or dominant discourses can be explored'. Also, it was hoped that the data would present glimpses into the women's 'psychological habitat(s)' (Tesch, 1990: 38). As indicated above, I would not be seeking to measure these aspects in quantitative ways but would be seeking a more subtle and nuanced grasp of some core aspects of self.

This would be revealed, it was anticipated, through the women's subjective interpretations of some hard-to-measure concepts like personhood and personal agency in the different environmental frames of the 1970s and 1990s. The idea of socially constructed role patterns and behavioural norms for motherhood would be kept in view alongside an awareness of the mothers' accounts as having been personally constructed.

(ii) Theories of human behaviour

In my search for a suitable methodology, an exploration of some theories of human behaviour in the literature offered some useful insights. Specifically, two were of interest: these were symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. Symbolic interactionism presents human beings as in a constant process of interpreting and defining life episodes through their interaction with symbols: that is, the language and actions of others (Blumer, 1969; Tesch, 1990). It seemed reasonable to suppose that the women in my research, as with the population as a whole, would have drawn to some extent on the behaviours, attitudes, values and experiences of others in their formulation of motherhood within their separate time contexts. Reflecting further on the theory of symbolic interactionism, I decided that individuals sharing ideas about motherhood in real-time interaction with their peers might be worth considering, so I kept the idea of groups in mind. Polkinghorne (1983: 106) notes that an individual's subjective interpretation of experience represents their personal 'meaning-making', however, a shared, or group 'essence of experience' offers additional value.

A further idea of relevance was phenomenology, which has its roots in philosophy (Fink, 1970). The literature revealed that research which engages in any way with the psyche of its subjects may be considered to be broadly phenomenological or existential (Polkinghorne, 1983). Examples of research which had drawn on this perspective were

sourced in the literature. Smith (1999), for example, showcases a phenomenological approach in his study of women's transition to motherhood. Patten (2002) also highlights the way in which a phenomenological approach has synergy with the aim of seeking to discover the meaning, structure and essence of lived experience:

The experiences of the different people are bracketed, analysed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example ... the essence of becoming a mother.

Patten (2002:106)

(iii) A feminist research perspective

Being a role specific to women, the subject of motherhood indicated consideration of a feminist research perspective which was searched in the literature (Harding, 1987 and 2004; McCarl Nielson, 1990; Oakley, 2004). The literature revealed that an original purpose in developing a specifically feminist research methodology had been to challenge quantitative approaches to social research, viewed as inadequate for exploring women's experiences. Participants involved in such enterprises, it was argued, had been used as instruments for the generation of data with only scant concern for their immediate or longer-term benefits (Takhar, 2003). In more traditional research paradigms, it was further argued, the researcher remains apart from his/her 'subjects', being concerned with their individual concerns only when revelation of these would contribute to the objectives of the research (Maynard, 2004).

Researchers working in the feminist paradigm challenge this way of working by placing the subjects' personal views, experiences and concerns at the centre of the research endeavour; revelation and validation of their private, emotional, internalised and intimate worlds, it is claimed, can afford the subjects immediate and sometimes longer-term benefits. In a wider way, research from this perspective may have emancipatory objectives,

for example, to reveal features of gender inequality and asymmetry within society (Cook and Fonow, 1990; McCarl Nielson, 1990; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Harding, 2004; Oakley, 2004). To summarise, research set within a feminist research paradigm is generally conducted *by* women and *for* women, having a prime objective to explore and validate their experiences. Aspects of women's lives which are relational and interpersonal are of particular interest to feminist researchers.

A further development for researchers committed to a feminist research paradigm is to take the process of shared life experience one step further with the researcher's experiences and ideas, in a sense, becoming part of the data. Oakley (2004), for example, outlines the benefits of this more radical approach. Here the researcher locates herself on the same critical plane as the participants beyond a sharing of biographical factors but with an equal sharing of information from a claim that there can be 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (Oakley, 2004: 264-5). Thus elements of Oakley's own identity were invested in the researcher/participant relationship, with personal information divulged in a quest to seek this from others. In effect, Oakley (2004) herself becomes a tool in the collection of women's ideas and experiences. This way of proceeding, she claims, also meets a broader aim of constructing a kind of sociology of womanhood, by researcher and researched identifying together what it means to be female in late 20th century society.

However, concerns are expressed about this more radical conception of feminist research regarding its likely compromise to the status and reliability of data (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998; Watts, 2006). Specifically, Ribbens and Edwards (1998) consider where the limits of researcher self-revelation ought properly to rest to ensure effective and reliable data collection. For Ramazanoglu and Holland (2004), on the other hand, there remains the question of establishing the academic status of research conducted through more radical

interpretations of the feminist paradigm. However, Harding (2004) supports Oakley's (2004) view that a researcher's honest personal exposure, alongside that of her participants, can afford *greater* objectivity, not less. Maynard (2004), however, remains unconvinced, criticising the claim that such interpretations of the feminist research perspective can offer a more complete and less distorted picture of women's lives than other approaches. She concludes:

Feminist work needs to be rigorous if it is to be regarded as intellectually compelling, politically persuasive, policy-relevant and meaningful to anyone other than the feminists themselves. (Maynard, 2004: 471)

Whilst the benefits of adopting a feminist research approach for this enquiry into motherhood were recognised, the possible compromise to objectivity by adopting its more radical elements were kept in mind. In parallel with the above considerations, the search for an appropriate data source continued. One early idea was to use data from previously recorded material, in parallel with, or in place of, data from live subjects.

3. Finding a suitable tool for data gathering

A brief discussion of the process of decision making concerning the use of recorded material as a data source comes next. An account of two methods for collecting primary data follows.

(i) Recorded material

Recorded material from sound broadcasts on the subject of motherhood was originally considered as a data source. With this in mind, I set about researching suitable programmes, with the BBC's *Woman's Hour* first identified as having potential. I contacted the BBC and was given permission to access their sound broadcast archives.

However, after spending some time searching the records it became evident that most of the material which had been retained on the topic of 'motherhood', for the most part, involved interviews with women celebrities. This material was highly idiosyncratic and unrepresentative of the women from the social worlds intended for this research. The idea of using material from the *Woman's Hour* programme was therefore abandoned. Staying with the idea of drawing on sound broadcast media, the BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme was next researched as a possible source. However, once this material was accessed it became clear that decision making concerning which programmes through the years in question should be retained had been somewhat arbitrary, with several blocks of time missing from the archives. A further complicating factor was the extensive range of the record systems utilised, with microfiche, text, sound recordings et cetera. Taken together, these negative indicators, I decided, would undermine the reliability of any data from this source, so I concentrated on collecting primary data only. I gave consideration to some ways this might be done.

(ii) *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are sometimes described as conversations with a purpose (Mason, 1996). The usefulness of this tool for collecting 'complex subjective phenomena' like the 'perceptions, feelings and attitudes' of subjects is also highlighted by Malseed (2004: 267). When conducted in a flexible format, the literature also highlights the ways in which semi-structured interviews may afford space for the subject to present her contribution through categories of *personal* importance, rather than through those of the researcher (Malseed, 2004). These features seemed to meet with my research aims and purposes, so the idea of using semi-structured interviews for the fieldwork was seriously considered. However, the additional benefits of a *group* format for data collection, as

highlighted in the literature, was kept in view (Polkinghorne, 1983; Tesch, 1990; Patten, 2002).

(iii) *Focus groups*

The use of focus groups as a research tool is a fairly recent innovation in social science research. Nevertheless, research activity utilising focus groups for business and marketing purposes can be traced back as far as the 1940s (Kreuger, 2004). Although focus groups remained relatively under-used in academic circles until the 1990s, their potential as a tool for social research, especially in areas of complexity, is now well recognised (Morgan, 1997; Kreuger and Casey, 2000; Litoselliti, 2003).

Focus groups are promoted as especially suitable for investigating sensitive topics, as thus 'participants may feel empowered and supported in the co-presence of those similarly situated to themselves' (Bloor *et al.*, 2001:16). In addition, Morgan, (1997: 142) observes a 'respectfulness' and 'lack of condescension' on the part of the researcher towards the participants of focus groups. These factors appeared to have some synergy with some important aspects of the feminist research paradigm described above. Researchers are warned, however, that focus groups can prove inferior to individual interviews if they miss out on elements of atypical behaviour. This can occur, for example, if individuals feel pressured to comply with group opinion: more likely to occur, it is argued, if participants are given the task of arriving at a 'consensus position' (Bloor *et al.*, 2001) This would not be the object of this present research.

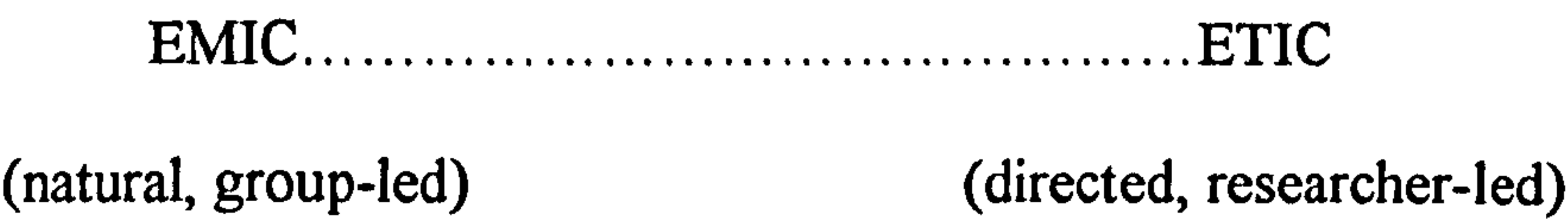
I gradually became convinced of the case for using focus groups, but to verify still further I reviewed some recent research which had used this method. One was Bulmer's (1998) study: *Clinical Decisions Defining Meaning through Focus Groups*. Another was

Frangoulis' (1998) *The Influence of Maternal Employment on Women's Emotional Well-Being after Having Their First Child*. These studies highlight the different ways that focus groups might be utilised at different stages of a research project and for different purposes. The two examples cited, Bulmer (1998) and Frangoulis (1998) had used focus groups for two very different purposes in their research design. These studies also afforded helpful insights into the management of focus groups in action.

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990: 12) set out a detailed and convincing case for focus groups which can be summarised in the following way. Firstly, focus groups can elicit quick and varied data, enriched by individual responses. Secondly, the facilitator, as observer, may record elements of non-verbal data, such as body language, voice tone etc which can enrich, supplement, or even contradict verbal data. At the same time, there can be direct interaction between participants and facilitator, allowing for clarification, probing and follow-up. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) emphasise the flexibility of focus groups for meeting with specific research aims, as indicated above (Bulmer, 1998; Frangoulis, 1998). Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) also point out, with respect to the analysis process, that the resulting data is usually understandable and accessible, unlike that generated by more sophisticated survey research methods. Lastly, convincing argument is presented that focus groups offer 'value-added', through the 'synergistic' effect of the group setting, where ideas which might not have been uncovered in individual interviews may surface (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990: 16). Others concur with this view, describing the focus group process as especially fruitful, because, like life, it happens in a social context (see especially Kitzinger, 1994).

However, it was clear from the literature that the facilitator's role and style in the management of focus groups would be critical if all the above advantages were to be

realised. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990: 13) offer a helpful model in this regard. They set this out as *emic* data, which arises in a natural or indigenous form and *etic* data, that arises from the researcher’s own focus. This can be expressed as follows:



Giving consideration to the way focus groups had been used in the research cited (Bulmer, 1998; Frangoulis, 1998) it was decided that the orientation and style of the facilitation for effective and reliable data generation would operate best towards the centre of this continuum, rather than positioned at either end. Some aspects of the facilitator’s role and positioning have been considered already in the discussion of the feminist research paradigm. Further observations regarding facilitation are provided later in the chapter, when the question of researcher reflexivity is considered and the focus group process for data generation is described.

It was decided that if focus groups were to be utilised for the generation of data, triggers would be required to stimulate the discussions (Denscombe, 1998). If it could be arranged, I could see the benefit of these triggers being generated by mothers who matched the biographical features of the target groups. However, I did not wish to pre-empt the spontaneity of engagement of the mothers who would participate in the focus groups by using these same women. The process of searching for suitable participants to take part in the research had still to be carried out. Once this had been achieved, I decided that if more than sufficient participants came forward, a small number representative of both generations could be invited to take part in some preliminary fieldwork for the generation of topics. I decided to use semi-structured interviews for this purpose, to be conducted

prior to the focus groups. The recorded material could be then analysed and key topics extracted, perhaps by using grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1999), a discussion of which follows. I felt fairly confident that topics extrapolated from data generated in the semi-structured interviews would have resonance for the participants in the main study.

To summarise, following extensive engagement with the literature two separate tools for gathering data were decided upon. These were semi-structured interviews for the preliminary fieldwork and focus groups for the main data collection process. With respect to the focus groups planned for the main study, it was decided that the separate generations of 1970s and 1990s mothers should work together in peer groups to engage in a process of 'retrospective introspection' (Bloor *et al.*, 2001: 5).

There was still the question of data analysis to be resolved in terms of methodological approach. Bryman and Burgess (1994: 216) remind the researcher of the 'attractive nuisance' of a voluminous amount of qualitative data, 'often unstructured and unwieldy'. In this regard, the methods literature emphasises the importance of establishing a pre-determined, systematic and verifiable procedure for handling data (Silverman, 2001; Kreuger, 2004). For the research on women as mothers it was decided that both the data collection and data analysis processes should proceed inductively: there would be no contrived hypotheses to prove or disprove, as is the case with more traditional deductive approaches. To summarise, with an inductive approach, theory is inferred from collections of instances or phenomena (de Botton, 2001).

4. Data analysis: Grounded Theory

At the time of its formulation in the 1960s, Glaser and Strauss's inductive approach to data analysis, Grounded Theory, was recognised as a radical departure from what had gone before (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). The principle of the grounded theory approach is that the researcher proceeds inductively, the data *leads* the process as there are no hypotheses or *a priori* categories to be proved or disproved: 'Grounded Theory is the discovery of what is there and emerges' (Glaser, 1998: 4).

Any inductive process of data analysis such as grounded theory requires a system of coding to 'summarise, synthesize and sort' (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 5). Codes can provide an important link between the data and the researcher's conceptualisation of what is emerging. Broadly speaking, in grounded theory there are two main stages to the coding process. In the initial process the researcher scrutinises the data and identifies segments which appear to be significant and/or problematic for the participants and which resonate in some way with the research questions. Kelle (2004) describes this stage as the researcher settling on a series of propositions generated from significant instances. Once this stage is complete, the researcher then proceeds to the 'axial' stage of coding which looks for connections between the initial categories (Lee, 1993).

The literature reminds the researcher that, at each stage of the coding process, the codes must be considered in the nature of 'building blocks for emergent rather than pre-specified concepts' (Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 7). For this reason, a process of memo writing: preparing written accounts of the emerging concepts and connections, takes place. These notes will be regularly consulted, added to and later drawn upon towards the concluding stage of the process, the formulation of theory from data (Bryman and Burgess, 1994).

With respect to the emergent categories, the researcher is advised to commit to the

principles of 'parsimony and scope: that is, using the smallest number of concepts to achieve the greatest explanatory power' (Glaser, 1993: 2).

Whilst the initial coding is an early procedure in the grounded theory process, the subsequent stages may well not follow a neat linear path. At the stage of axial coding, for example, the researcher may find herself in a constant process of moving backwards and forwards between her notes and the data to scrutinise and verify. She is required to keep an open mind about what seems to be emerging, returning to her initial codes and to the whole text from time to time to confirm the reliability of what was first settled upon. She may confirm her first ideas, or change her mind. In this way the critical categories will be truly emergent and not imposed (Glaser, 1993; Mason, 1996). Whilst some writers are mildly scathing of such formulaic approaches to analysing data (see, for example, Patten, 2002) others are of the view that coding is necessary to ensure that the process is conducted systematically (Seale, 2004).

In the process of engaging with data from all four focus groups it would be important to remain alert not only to issues of salience for the participants and interconnections with the research questions, but to questions of frequency (how often a subject comes up) and extensiveness (how many participants contributed to it). The literature also indicates how intensity and tone in participant voice can be significant, so it would be important to listen to the audio recordings during the initial stages of working with the transcripts (Kreuger, 1998; Pera Kyla, 2004).

In summary, the first challenge of an analysis process which works inductively is to identify the issues which are significant and/or problematic for the participants and which have resonance with the research intentions (Glaser, 1998). At the second, axial coding

stage these issues are grouped and conceptualised and the researcher begins to speculate on what might account for the variations and similarities in participant response (Glaser, 1992). The challenge of an inductive approach, as with other forms of analysis, is for the researcher to make reasoned decisions about which categories are secure and whether these are substantial enough to lead to ensuing theory: 'The theory matures as elements of the data are integrated into the whole and the grounded network of relationships is established' (Lee, 1993). In this regard, the literature strongly encourages the researcher to revisit the data with some frequency to search for examples which might falsify her assumptions. It is argued that only when she has made these checks and adjusted her material accordingly can the researcher be assured that she has made the right decisions about how she has conceptualised the data (Silverman, 2001). Once settled, the conceptual categories may comprise the subsections of the data discussion chapters, organised under the overarching themes.

5. Avoiding bias

What follows is a brief discussion of the timing of the literature review in relation to gathering and analysing the data with the objective of avoiding the bias of pre-conceived ideas. Glaser and Strauss (1999) recommend that a detailed review is delayed until after the data has been collected and the categories have emerged. Their reasoning is that the researcher's general understanding of the knowledge field and her professional understanding are sufficient for making appropriate judgements about the data, uncontaminated by what others have found. Dick (2008) broadly concurs with this view, advising the researcher to engage with the literature only as it becomes relevant to what has been discovered in the data. Seale (2004) disagrees, however, arguing that decisions about the way the data is coded of necessity relate to ideas in the literature accessed prior to conducting the fieldwork.

It seemed reasonable to suppose that prior judgements about data significance will be reliant to some extent upon a researcher's knowledge of the field. At the same time, when formulating theory from data, the argument for the researcher to seriously attempt to keep the substantive (arising from the data) theories separate in her mind from those she already knows about appeared sound. Kreuger (1998) agrees, warning that over-familiarity with a subject area, as with a participant category, can serve to undermine the analysis process. Conversely, as discussed earlier with respect to feminist research methodology, familiarity with a participant category may be viewed as a particular strength (Harding, 1987; Oakley, 2004).

Biased judgements can be avoided if the researcher remains alert both to her personal epistemology and to her ontological positioning, and sensitive to how these might influence her judgement at any point. Flick (1998) rightly comments that this requires honesty about one's ideological position; she also urges researchers to be wary about hooking on to ideas in the data which are either familiar to oneself, or acceptable to oneself, or both. Flick (1998: 26) helpfully concludes that, if it is about anything, human research is about deepening understanding 'about what something means to someone else', not about confirming one's own opinions. However, no research exists in a vacuum. A researcher's ontological positioning may influence how she selects and presents her evidence (her epistemology). Whatever her positioning, the researcher should consider the possibility that all knowledge arises, in a sense, from constructed explanations, in the same way that behaviour can also be constructed (Mason, 1996). (See below for further discussion of researcher reflexivity).

6. Ensuring Validity and Reliability

The criteria for 'reliability' in a research project turns on the question of whether the judgements of a different researcher would correlate with one's own, or whether one's present judgements would correlate with judgements one might make on a different occasion. Silverman, (2001) makes a general point that reliability can appear suspect when the researcher has failed to make her research procedure transparent by providing adequate documentation. Once there is evidence that this has been done, credibility can be further assured with a liberal provision of 'low inference descriptors' such as verbatim accounts; conversely reliability is undermined if readers are presented with 'little more than brief, persuasive data extracts' (Silverman, 2001: 255, citing Seale, 1999). Overall, a systematic application of a step-by-step research process, with checks and balances in place as described, affords the best assurance of reliability (Glaser, 1993; Mason, 1996; Silverman, 2001; Kreuger, 2004).

The issue of validity, on the other hand, turns on the question of whether the overall research result truly represents what it claims to represent. Again, certain checks and balances are required. These include researcher awareness of how the research process may impact on her subjects, influencing its outcome. Approaching the data with a balance of trust and scepticism on the part of the researcher is also important. Seeking correlations through a process of triangulation: comparing data collected at different stages of a research project or by checking one's findings against those of similar studies affords further reassurance (Silverman, 2001). However, the literature warns the researcher that triangulation cannot claim 'objective truth' for there can never be just one truly valid description of a cultural phenomenon (Silverman, 2001).

In conclusion, a systematic application of the data collection process, made transparent through adequate recording and reporting systems, is a critical test for both reliability and validity (Silverman, 2001). Submitting the data to a process of systematic and rigorous analysis is another. Here, as discussed, hypotheses are generated, scrutinised and tested through a process of constant comparison as with grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

7. Organising the Research

Having decided on semi-structured interviews and then focus groups to collect the data and grounded theory to analyse it, the next task was to find participants who would fit the criteria for the research. Once this was done arrangements for the fieldwork could be set in place. Other important factors to be considered at both the planning and operational stages of the fieldwork concerned the issues of ethics and researcher reflexivity.

(i) Locating participants who fitted the research criteria

It was decided that the criteria could be satisfied if the main fieldwork arrangement of focus groups involved around 20 women, half of whom had experienced motherhood in the 1970s and half in the 1990s. Ideally, these would comprise four groups, each with five participants. The decision to keep the groups small in number was intentional, given the complexity and sensitive nature of the subject area (Bloor *et al.*, 2001). The preliminary telephone exercise was planned as one hour interviews involving approximately three participants from each generation, this number being thought sufficient to meet the aims. As indicated above, this data would be analysed using grounded theory methodology to extrapolate discussion triggers for the focus groups. In summary, whilst not extensive in scope in terms of the number of participants involved, the plans for both stages of the

fieldwork were felt sufficient for the task of gaining insights into the role perceptions of the two generations of mothers.

Being a sole researcher, I had to be practical and set clear boundaries around what was possible. As discussed, the aim was to work with women who had experienced motherhood in the 1970s and 1990s. However, in the process of seeking participants it was anticipated that some of the women coming forward might have produced children marginally outside these two decades as well as within them. However, if the main representation stayed within the specified decades, the possibility of a minimum proportion of subjects having produced other children marginally outside these decades was not perceived as a problem.

To access participants willing to take part and who would fulfil the criteria I decided I would need to draw from a source likely to generate the appropriate categories (SOC, 2000) and from a population for whom the subject of motherhood was one of personal interest. I decided, therefore, to approach the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) because my previous involvement with this organisation led me to believe that their self-selected membership would broadly fit the criteria of women working in, or having worked in, professional or semi-professional occupations (SOC, 2000). Contact was made with their Head of Research and Policy, outlining the purposes of the research and the kinds of participants being sought. I was aware that establishing personal legitimacy was important when approaching organisations for the purposes of research (Watts, 2006). To verify credibility therefore, I supplied professional details and a list of published work, along with details of earlier involvement with the NCT as an Ante-natal Teacher and Education for Parenthood Coordinator (1979-1990).

The NCT responded positively with suggestions of two e-address systems which might be utilised for making contact with their members. These were:

1. The NCT e-group forum membership
2. The NCT Access to Services and Support Survey

On the issue of data protection, checks were made within the NCT concerning their release of personal information prior to the databases being sent to me. After reviewing the lists I decided that members who had used the NCT's periodic Services and Support survey were likely to be more representative of the *younger* generation of mothers only, those of the 1990s. In consultation with the NCT, it was decided therefore that their e-group forum membership would be more likely to afford representation of both generations of mothers. I provided a document outlining the research purposes and the fieldwork arrangements for the NCT to send out as an email attachment to the e-group forum membership (see Appendix II). Whilst several months away, September was chosen for the focus groups, to give space and time for the preliminary telephone interviews to be arranged and conducted and for the resulting data to be distilled into discussion triggers as explained above. With this arrangement there would also be time to seek participants from other sources, should this prove necessary. It was anticipated also that I would need to allow sufficient time for the somewhat complex logistical arrangements for the focus groups to be set in place.

The specific locations chosen for the focus groups were London and Nottingham, a capital and a provincial city. With appropriate permission I could gain evening access to suitable rooms at The Open University Regional Centres in these locations. The rooms would be quiet and of a size conducive to groupwork, with easy access to parking, refreshment facilities et cetera. Once I had received the responses from NCT members interested in being involved in the research, I contacted those who fitted the criteria and who lived

within reach of either London or Nottingham to invite them take part in the focus groups. Six of the several others who had made contact but were more geographically distant were invited to take part in the telephone interviews. Each preliminary interview was planned to last approximately one hour, whereas the four focus groups each involving five participants were each planned to last one and a half hours. In the event, the NCT members were supplemented by a minority of participants from other sources who fitted the criteria. For example, four participants were generated from interest in an article about the research published in the Nottingham Evening Post.

As with projects of a similar nature, these subjects were not selected on a random basis but because they had responded to a request for women who had mothered in either the 1970s or 1990s to participate in some research. Contact was made as described above with a number selected through a process of purposeful sampling on the basis of biographical factors which would fit the criteria of the study. In another sense, the 27 participants were 'opportunity' samples because they were subjects who had come forward and personally indicated their willingness to be involved in a research enterprise designed to explore perceptions of motherhood.

Whilst generalisation is not possible from the data arising from a sample of this size, a reasonable claim can be made that these subjects were not untypical of women from similar social groups sharing common constructions of motherhood in the separate eras of the 1970s and 1990s. However, it would be unrealistic to believe that any findings resulting from such a small-scale study could claim application to a larger population. However, Mason (1996) argues that this does not necessarily mean that the findings may not have wider resonance, especially if other research has found similarly.

(ii) Arrangements for the preliminary fieldwork: The telephone interviews

It was decided that each of the semi-structured interviews should last no longer than one hour, as recommended in the literature (Denscombe, 1998; Arksey, 2004). Once selected, the six participants were contacted by email to confirm their willingness to participate. I estimated that the interviews would need to be completed by mid-July, prior to the holiday period. This would also allow sufficient time for analysis of the data to extrapolate the topics in readiness for the focus groups, due to take place in September, as discussed. I was happy for a later participant to join in early July as she met the criteria, and this helped to balance the generation mix, making a total of seven mothers altogether for the preliminary fieldwork.

Prior to the telephone interviews a letter was sent to the participants reminding them of the research aims, the purpose of the preliminary fieldwork and with an indication of some possible areas for discussion (see Appendix III).

(iii) Arrangements for the main fieldwork: The focus groups

The literature highlights several issues to be considered and obstacles to be overcome by the researcher when organising focus groups, which can present logistical challenges over and above those of one-to-one interviews (Litoselliti, 2003). This turned out to be the case. A significant number of paper and electronic communications with the participants happened during the period between their agreeing to take part and the actual meetings in London and Nottingham. To ensure that everything would go to plan, a week in advance of the focus groups a further letter was sent reminding the participants of the dates, times and venues, and of how the fieldwork would be conducted, including reference to the ethical protocols (see Appendix IV).

Before the two fieldwork processes are described there is pause here for discussion of two aspects which required serious consideration before conducting the research: ethics and reflexivity.

8. Important considerations for research with human subjects

(i) *Ethics*

Broadly speaking, ethics are codes of behaviour based on the moral principle of doing no harm. A researcher's commitment to sound ethics is about respecting the rights and needs of the participants equal to, and often beyond her own (Mason, 1996; Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). At the planning stage the researcher should anticipate any possible consequences of the research process for the participants, both positive and negative. In this way the human rights of the individuals involved are recognised and respected. Additional to adhering to the principle of avoiding harm, the researcher must work in compliance with the law and strive to uphold scientific standards (IST, 2004).

In summary, sound ethical principles should underpin all elements of the research process and can be distilled into three watchwords, neatly summarised by Watts (2006: 386) as consent, confidentiality and conduct. An ethical approach begins with establishing an appropriate style of contact with potential subjects, including the provision of adequate information about the research and what participation is likely to involve (Appendix II). It is usually recommended that no inducements to participate should be offered in the form of payment or gifts, but travel expenses should be reimbursed (IST, 2004). University research protocols generally include guidance on how the resultant data should be collected, stored and accessed (SHSW, 2001). In summary, the management of the research process throughout should demonstrate appropriate levels of professionalism and integrity.

The literature emphasises participants' right to anonymity through the avoidance of using personal details likely to lead to their identification, unless these details are essential for the study and appropriate permission has been given. Assuring participant anonymity by changing names and other details is generally unproblematic, but as Wengraf (2001) points out, confidentiality in the purest sense, can sometimes present more of a problem. Ensuring *complete* confidentiality may mean that the material should not be used in any public way, which can preclude citing extracts in academic publications and presentations. However, Wengraf is of the opinion that, generally speaking, the non-use of material for these purposes can only be assured if a participant specifically requests it. Wengraf is clear that if the aims and purposes of the study have been communicated to participants beforehand, with permission sought for appropriate future use of the material and assurance that names and identifying details will be changed, the researcher's ethical responsibilities have been fulfilled.

(ii) *Researcher Reflexivity*

*What I write is not independent of who
I am: my knowledge is located knowledge.*
(Romito, 1997: 62)

Engaging in the process of reflexivity is part of sound research ethics (Mason, 1996). Before the question of researcher reflexivity is discussed, the feminist point about the advantages of shared life experience between the subjects and the person conducting the research is briefly revisited. In earlier discussion, points of concern were made about more radical interpretations of the feminist research paradigm. In this case the researcher is implicated in the data generation process beyond the conventional expectations of her role as initiator, facilitator, observer and recorder (Maynard, 2004). Whilst the benefits of

setting research with women in a feminist paradigm were acknowledged, remaining alert to the difference between 'going there' (the setting up and management of the research) and 'being there' (being personally engaged in the process) is important (see Birch, 1998: 172-175 for a consideration of these two positions). At the same time, when a researcher's life experience has aspects in common with those of the participants a genuine, rather than instrumental, rapport may be generated (Maynard, 2004). It is further argued that this factor may offer the benefits of a 'conscious partiality', superior to the 'spectator knowledge of a researcher who does not have common experiences and common understandings with her research participants (Cook and Fornow, 1990: 76).

Methodologically it is clear that at all stages the researcher should reflect on her personal positioning and its potentially contaminating effect. This reflexive process should continue into the analysis stage if a biased selection and interpretation of the data through the researcher's own cultural and environmental lens is to be avoided (Polkinghorne, 1983).

As implied, persons can never completely stand outside their socio/cultural worlds (Burns, 1979; Stanley and Wise 1993). All knowledge is to some extent conditional knowledge (Romito, 1997). For all that, the literature is clear that a researcher's reflexive alertness to the way she experiences and interprets the world can go some way towards the avoidance of any contaminating bias (McCarl Nielson, 1990; Mason, 1996; Wengraf, 2001; Winter, 2002).

9. Fieldwork Stage 1: Semi-structured interviews

Due to a research objective of respect for individual prioritisation and choice, the one-hour semi-structured interviews conducted over the telephone were loosely framed, allowing for a self-selected approach. Although formulated to meet the objectives of the research, the

questions were designed to give space for the subjects to move into areas of their own choosing to introduce and develop any issues of personal significance. It was anticipated that the mothers involved in this preliminary stage of the fieldwork, as in the later focus groups, would become engaged in an interplay between re-living past experiences and a present-time reconstruction of 'personal meanings and emotions' (Chamberlayne and King, 1997: 604). In several ways this turned out to be the case.

After greeting each participant I thanked them for agreeing to take part, confirming that they had received my letter reminding them of the broad intentions of the study. Following introductions, I reminded each participant that the session was scheduled to last for approximately one hour. The women were told to expect six questions on the general area of their experience of becoming a mother, with space afforded at the end to add anything they thought important but had not had the opportunity to include. Before the discussion began the women were reminded to respond to the questions in ways of their own choosing. Having had no rehearsal of their ideas, a high level of spontaneity was hoped for.

The underlined headings, preceding the questions below, indicate the general areas it was hoped would be included in the interviews, to reflect the aims of the research:

- Biographical details: 'Would you like to tell me a little of your background, including about when you became a mother?'
- The 'personhood-parenthood' split: 'When you became a mum, how much of your old identity/life did you manage to hold on to?'
- A Turning point: 'How has motherhood changed you as a person?'
- Motherhood and mothering: 'To what extent do/did you feel that 'mothering' in the sense of day-to-day activity is/was a necessary part of 'motherhood?'

- The motherhood role: ‘What are mothers for?’
- Whose rights? ‘How do/did you balance the competing rights of all those significant to you in the early years of your child’s life: for example, your child, yourself, your husband/partner, your employer etc?’
- Any other points: ‘Is there anything else which you feel is/was relevant which you’d like to tell me about?’

To some extent it was expected that these questions would engage the women in issues of identity and perceptions of role. It was also hoped that they would offer insights into the ways they (had) negotiated the compromises between the different life roles they wished to /were expected to perform. It was anticipated also that the semi-structured interviews also might begin to reveal generational contrast with respect to the women’s different socio-cultural environments, perhaps highlighting some time-specific discourses.

The participants appeared to encounter no difficulties with the questions, each responding in an open and flowing manner. A few anticipated some of the later questions early on, but, when this occurred the flow was not interrupted out of respect for the right of each participant to develop her points in ways of her own choosing.

The interviews provided insights into the women’s somewhat diverse experiences of motherhood and, whilst, in some cases not all-inclusive of the subject area, appeared to anticipate some interesting directions for the main fieldwork. I had not been clear beforehand what the women’s agendas would be, but when I examined my recorded notes on the grounded theory paradigm I was able to extrapolate some commonly significant issues of importance which resonated with the research objectives. Twenty-three topics emerged as of shared significance. I felt reasonably confident of the likely relevance of

these discussion triggers for the focus groups, as they had been gained through extrapolation from data generated from participants having similar characteristics. Harding (1987) makes positive observations on this strategy. Of itself, the telephone interview data was of such high quality that I decided to give it further consideration at the analysis stage, once the main data collection process was complete.

The topics were placed on cards, ready for selection by the participants (see: Appendix V). After confirming that I had an adequate number of participants for the two focus groups in London and the two in Nottingham, I set about finalising arrangements for these.

10. Fieldwork Stage 2: Focus Groups

The initial fieldwork process of semi-structured interviews generated rich data and it was hoped that the focus groups would be similarly productive. There was the additional expectation that in the group setting, the participants would be stimulated by and perhaps also challenged by what other group members had to say (Bloor *et al.*, 2001).

(i) Facilitation of the groups

Whilst I had considerable experience of working with groups in a range of professional settings, it was important to re-engage with the literature on the facilitation of focus groups specifically. Guidance by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) and by Bulmer (1998) was illuminating in this regard. On the matter of group ‘process’ Bulmer (1998: 36), for example, reminds the facilitator to be alert to the ‘interpersonal dynamics of the group’ and to any ‘dominators’ and ‘hiders’; also for the facilitator to be watchful of her own performance. This theme is developed by Litoselliti (2003), who stresses the importance of reflexive moderation to reduce the risks of manipulation or false consensus. The facilitator is advised to strike an appropriate balance between an occasionally required directiveness

and allowing space for the discussion to flow from the participants' own priorities (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). This critical factor of facilitator flexibility is affirmed by Kitzinger (1994). For McCarl Nielson (1990: 7), however, it is the characteristic of 'verstehen', or empathetic understanding, which is critical to effective facilitation. Bearing in mind all these points, I prepared some facilitator's notes for myself to ensure appropriate management of the groups. At the same time I made a commitment to let the discussion flow (see: Appendix VI).

It was important to ensure that the subjects felt as relaxed as possible prior to their participation in the groups. The sessions were planned to commence at 6.30 pm with refreshments available from 6.00 pm. This short settling-in period enabled the participants to get to know each other a little and allowed space for me, as researcher/facilitator, to meet and have an informal chat with each one. Name badges were distributed, along with travel expense claim forms.

Attention to the physical setting for the focus groups included ensuring that everyone could get around one table and had eye contact with each other and myself. It was necessary also for the participants to be similar distances from the microphone, to ensure balance in volume and clarity for the recordings. Once around the table, the group was again welcomed and thanked for coming along. After this, the structure of the evening was outlined, along with health and safety protocols. Ethical considerations, as outlined earlier, were clearly stated, followed by details of the duration of the session (one-and-a-half hours). It was useful to have guidance from the literature on this (see, for example, Bloor *et al.*, 2001) who argue that focus groups involving unpaid participants should last no longer than one and a half hours).

(ii) *The focus groups in action*

Before commencing, the participants were referred to the Programme Outline, sent out prior to the meetings (see Appendix VII). Ground rules for the session were then invited from the group. These were discussed, settled by agreement and recorded on a flipchart. As Cole *et al.* (1999: 28) point out: 'Negotiating and establishing "Ground Rules" for working together can be important in creating an appropriate atmosphere for group work'.

The brief list which follows records the Ground Rules agreed by the first group of participants, protocols which were more or less replicated by the other groups:

1. For confidentiality to be observed: to work within the Chatham House rule that shared information should not be divulged to others outside the group in ways which might identify its source

(www.chathamhouse.org.uk/about/chatham/chathamhouserule, 2008)
2. To acknowledge that all group members have opinions and the right to express these, unless this expression is offensive to others.
3. To listen with respect and not to interrupt, and equally, not to monopolise the discussion.

The participants were next invited to consider some additional ground rules specific to the focus group format:

1. Participants to keep in mind that a focus group discussion is not about seeking 'correct answers' but about creating opportunities for sharing ideas, views and reflections between participants about similar life experiences, specifically in this case, motherhood.
2. Each participant to say her name prior to speaking on the first few occasions to assist with identification at the transcription stage. The participants were

reminded that, in line with ethical protocols, their names would be changed once the recordings had been transcribed to ensure anonymity.

3. Participants to indicate if they wished to 'chip in' and there was no space in the discussion to do so by raising their hand.

These further ground rules were agreed.

Each focus group followed the same format. After switching on the recorder, the participants were invited to give their names, plus brief details of their children, specifically names and ages. I similarly provided these details. The tape was rewound and played back to check for volume and clarity. Two audiocassette recorders and tapes were used in parallel in case one failed to function properly. The machines were then switched off for a brief ice-breaker designed to relax the group and get them used to talking together before the discussion proper. The literature highlights the benefits of ice-breaking activities, especially when participants are not previously known to each other yet will be expected to share personal ideas and experiences (Cole *et al.*, 1999). For the ice-breaker, each participant was invited to say their name and, if known, the reason why their parents chose it; alternatively to say whether they liked their name or not, and why. This activity was designed to begin the process of personal sharing in an atmosphere of lightness and fun. The literature indicates the ways in which such strategies can aid the establishment of 'a trusting, permissive, and comfortable environment that removes barriers to communication' (Kreuger, 2004: 393).

The idea of the topic cards as discussion triggers was then explained. The participants were informed that the topics had been distilled from interviews with mothers similar to themselves who had participated in some preliminary fieldwork. The 23 topics had been

assigned letters of the alphabet for later ease of identification at the analysis stage (see Appendix V). The final three letters X, Y and Z were assigned to blank cards, with additional cards available to record any further topics the participants might suggest.

For the purpose of topic prioritisation, the women worked in two sub-groups, each with a set of cards. Together, they were asked to negotiate the selection of four or five topics which held/had held particular resonance for them as mothers. There were particular reasons for this procedure: the first, to enable the topics to be prioritised, for clearly it was unlikely that all 23 topics could be covered in a single session. A second reason was to give the participants ownership of the selection process, and the third was to give the participants an opportunity to start reflecting on some issues and begin the process of communicating together in a less demanding format than that of the full focus group. When asked if there were any other issues important to them but not included, the participants were broadly of the opinion that the topics offered a fair representation of what the critical issues for them as mothers were/had been. However, across the groups four additional topics were suggested. These were: loneliness; fatherhood and partnerships; incentives; and personal aspirations. As these emerged they were included with the original topics for consideration. Even at this early stage of topic selection there was some indication of what was to come.

Following the selection process the prioritised cards were placed in the centre of the table. Agreement on a first topic was invited and discussion commenced. My observation notes indicate that the two groups of 1970s mothers took slightly longer to 'warm up' than was the case for the 1990s mothers. I have reflected on this and think that it may have been due in part to an initial difficulty for the earlier generation of women of recalling experiences and feelings from two decades or more, ago. The 1990s mothers, on the other hand, being

involved in the everyday process of motherhood, had no difficulty in sharing their ideas straight away. Initially they also displayed a greater intensity of need to discuss motherhood with other mothers, a circumstance found by Lazarre (1987) as discussed (Chapter 1). However, as the conversations proceeded, my notes recorded little difference in the enthusiasm between the two generations, or in the intensity of their discussion.

As expected, some of the participants were more vocal than others, but the recordings testified that each member of every group contributed in some way and there were no significant silences. When the material was transcribed, different directions in the flow of discussion and emphasis on particular topics in the separate groups was discernable. This broadly revealed different orientations of interest between the different generations. For example, topics prioritised in both 1990s focus groups included 'Conflicting role obligations - keeping a life balance'; 'Decision-making about childcare - choices and compromises'; 'The importance of status inside and outside the role' and 'Retaining an identity external to motherhood'. In contrast with this orientation, the 1970s participants focused more, for example, on 'The 24 hour responsibility of motherhood' and 'Balancing rights and responsibilities'.

At the close of each session the participants were thanked for their time and their contributions. Before departing they were each invited to take part in a short evaluation exercise. Two 'Post-it' notes were given to each participant to write responses (anonymously) to two questions:

1. How have you found the focus group discussions?
2. How do you feel now?

(iii) *The focus groups: Final reflections*

The fieldwork demonstrated the appropriateness of using focus groups for researching the complex subject of motherhood. The participants appeared comfortable with exploring personal issues in the presence of others similarly situated, a factor discovered also by Bloor *et al.* (2001). I also became aware of the value added element of data generation through the synergistic effect of the group setting, with discussions developed in rich detail and depth. Because the participants had a strong interest in the subject in focus they had been keen to initiate and maintain discussion meaning that a more flexible and less managerial style of facilitation could be adopted (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Morgan, 1997). There was an assumption of shared knowledge and experience in the groups, so the participants engaged readily and intensively with the topics, deepening discussion and revealing thoughtful reflections.

When approaching the data analysis I wondered if more groups would ensure greater theoretical saturation. However, as it was, the four groups had produced a considerable amount of rich data totalling some 46,000 words. I also had the data recorded from the seven one hour semi-structured interviews to reconsider during the analysis process.

11. The data

The decision to use grounded theory methodology for analysing the data had already been made. However, a decision about whether the data would be coded manually or computer aided had still to be decided. A short discussion of this is provided next. What follows then is a step by step account of the grounded theory approach as applied to the research data.

(i) A manual approach, or computer aided?

Once the focus groups were completed, decisions had to be made about how the data would be approached, whether manually or aided by computer. Whatever system was

selected, it was important for the process to be systematic and verifiable (Silverman, 2001; Kreuger, 2004).

There is a growing bank of methodological literature making a strong case for using computer software for systematising data (see Morgan, 1997, Bazely and Richards, 2000, Gibbs, 2004 and Kelle, 2004). In contrast, other literature presents convincing evidence of the drawbacks of electronic methods for analysing qualitative data. Mason (1996), for example, warns that an over-reliance on software can have the effect of ‘driving’ the analytical and epistemological processes, because a computer programme can be overly literal in its work. I was concerned that an electronic tool might enforce a reductive process on the rich data generated in the four focus groups and in the preliminary telephone exercise. Mason (1996) further argues that a manual approach affords closer familiarisation with the data than computer systems. Close familiarisation was seen as especially important for dealing with the complexity of two different data sets collected in focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Not least, I decided, a software package might not pick up on critical nuances of tone and intention in what the mothers said, nor the important group effect. Having taken account of the literature presenting arguments for and against using computer software, I decided to proceed with a ‘hands-on’ approach.

(ii) *The analysis: A grounded theory approach*

What follows now is a step-by-step account of the data analysis. I kept to a systematic protocol making detailed notes at all stages of the process which is described below:

- After transcribing the data I photocopied the documents in triplicate (spare copies would be then available for cutting up and sorting, as appropriate). Different-

coloured paper was used for each focus group printout and for the separate interview data so the material could be identified when disaggregated.

- The process of text analysis began with a careful reading of each set of transcribed data from the focus groups. The audiotapes were listened to alongside this first reading, to pick up any discrepancies between the transcriptions and recordings and to re-focus again on the live experience.
- For each transcript, notes were made on which topics had received greatest attention; observations were made also on the ebb and flow of each discussion and the balance of participant contribution.
- A second scrutiny of the data, line by line, was then conducted, highlighting data which appeared salient for the mothers and which resonated with the purposes of the research in the form of marginal notes. For example, it was observed that a significant amount of data had been generated in two of the discussions, one of a 1970s group and the other of a 1990s group, on the question of how motherhood was, or was not, valued in their separate eras. In this regard, the initial coding process identified the following segments:
 - (i) Some 1970s mothers indicated that in their time full-time motherhood was an ‘acceptable’ and valued role, even for educated women;
 - (ii) Although socially valued, some 1970s mothers had found full-time motherhood unsatisfying and ‘overly constraining’;
 - (iii) 1990s mothers thought that motherhood was not valued;
 - (iv) The 1990s environment, while ‘child-centred’, was not ‘mother-centred’;
 - (v) Motherhood in the 1990s was viewed more in the nature of a ‘part-time’ role for

educated women and expected to be managed alongside other roles, like paid work;

(vi) Motherhood was perceived in 1990s society as a role which anyone could do.

In the example given here, the segments were grouped, creating a conceptual category: 'Motherhood role status'. Decisions about these categories were documented, with the sources identified. Observations were made and tentative hypotheses noted.

- Once some tentative conceptual groupings had been done with the focus group material, data from the first stage of the fieldwork of seven semi-structured interviews (having already been subjected to analysis to distil topics for the discussion groups), was then revisited and reconsidered alongside the focus group data, now organised into conceptual categories. Comparing data from the two collection processes served as a verification check for the initial conceptual decision-making (Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Silverman, 2001).
- As recommended in the literature, I revisited the transcripts to search for any evidence which might refute the decisions made (Glaser, 1992; Lee, 1993; Silverman, 2001). I stayed with some decisions and changed my mind about others. For example, I had initially grouped data from 1990s mother, Debbie, about how she and her partner had decided that he should be the full-time carer for their infant daughter with other data about fathers into the conceptual category: 'Fatherhood'. However when I revisited the data I changed my mind and grouped Debbie's account with that of others on the issue of 'Childcare'.

- Once I felt settled about the conceptual categories, I selected particular segments for quoting where these had effectively distilled experiences, perspectives and insights. I made sure that each segment could be identified (by noting participant name and page reference). I cut these out and pasted them on to flipcharts, each headed with the category in question.
- Once this task was complete, I wrote a storyboard for each conceptual category, referring to the notes I had made at both initial selection and grouping stages. These accounts later helped to define a structural framework for each data discussion chapter.
- I then scrutinised all the flipchart sheets, placing them side by side on the floor to consider various possibilities concerning how they might be thematically grouped. After some deliberation, three broad themes were settled upon. These were: 'Social trends'; 'Positioning motherhood' and 'Mothers, babies and others: Intervention and support'.
- Once this task was done, I returned to the 'whole' transcript and, selecting a different coloured index tab for each thematic area, identified segments of significance, cross-referencing them with the quotes on the sheets. This ensured that I would have a whole text, tabbed up copy to refer to in the long months of writing up. It also meant that the context of each segment could be quickly identified and revisited.
- Segments of text which might be considered as belonging to more than one theme were identified by using two or more coloured index tabs. These categories would

then be considered in more than one of the data discussion chapters because they revealed different properties and insights into a conceptual area. 'Motherhood and paid work' is an example having been considered in some instances as an issue of economic necessity, in other instances as a need to retain personhood in the context of motherhood.

- The three thematic areas outlined above each provided a focus for the data discussion chapters. The conceptual categories, for the most part, constituted the various sections and sub-sections of these chapters.
- Throughout the analysis process, I remained alert to the research objectives distilled in the research questions which sought to discover differences in motherhood role perceptions between two generations of women; secondly to reveal generational differences in the strength of personal agency the mothers had exercised in the ways they had constructed motherhood into their lives.

12. Conclusion

As discussed, this research is qualitative in nature and social constructionist in its positioning. Informed by feminist methodology it sought to gain authentic insights into the personal experiences of 27 mothers. In essence, the research has explored the intersection of socio-cultural setting and phenomenological experience for two generations of mothers.

In this chapter, an account of the empirical work has been presented in narrative form. The discussion began with a consideration of some different approaches to researching personal experience and a case was made for adopting a qualitative approach. The discussion then developed into a consideration of some theoretical perspectives of relevance. Methods for

data collection were discussed next with reasons given for conducting the fieldwork in two separate stages, through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The question of data analysis was then considered with the benefits of taking an inductive approach through the grounded theory methods outlined and procedures described. Next, the process of accessing suitable participants was described, with recognition of the limits of generalisation of this sample to wider populations. An account of the practical arrangements for the two stages of the fieldwork followed. Detailed accounts of the fieldwork in action progressed the discussion. In the final section there was a brief consideration of two approaches to data handling, with the reasons given for choosing a manual approach. This was followed by a step by step account of the analysis process, conducted through grounded theory methods.

Motherhood is an unbounded human story of considerable significance in women's lives. When investigating a topic like motherhood a researcher can only work with the material presented to her, collected in environments far from neutral and analysed through methods far from scientific (Silverman, 2001). The data was provided by the mothers with openness and candour as personal representations of their phenomenological experience. However, perspectives on the research process such as that presented by Hammersley (2004: 243) were kept in view at all times: 'There is not a single valid description of a situation or culture. Descriptions do not capture reality; at best they simply represent those aspects of it that are relevant to the purposes of motivating the enquiry'. The data revealed how the participants had made sense of and constructed motherhood through their selective accounts which may or may not have happened in the ways related. Throughout the fieldwork processes, however, each generation had critically engaged in the task of communicating the texture of their lives as mothers experienced against the backdrop of

two particular social landscapes. Within these separate settings, contrasting perceptions of motherhood were revealed.

As indicated above, when collecting data through qualitative methods, the veracity of the data can neither be proved nor disproved. Strictly speaking, therefore, the resulting data cannot be referred to as 'findings', as with more evidentiary methods. What was arrived at through the analysis process therefore might be considered more in the nature of a theorising of social explanations. However, whilst it is not possible to generalise with complete confidence from what was found, some tentative claims are made that what was revealed was not untypical of motherhood as experienced by similar populations of women living in the two separate eras in focus.

The individual voices of the mothers who participated weave through the discussions in the chapters which follow, which are arranged thematically. Before that, profiles of the participants are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

The Participant Profile

*You can attach the whole of moral
philosophy to a commonplace private
life just as well as to one of richer stuff.*

(de Montaigne, 1991: 908)

1. Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed in detail the methodological procedures for gathering and analysing the data. Before the themes which emerged out of the analysis are explored in the chapters that follow, some brief insights into the lives of the participants are presented here. Whilst each life is acknowledged as unique in character, the two generations as separate cohorts are first briefly discussed to highlight shared biographical features. Afterwards individual profiles of the mothers are presented.

2. Overview of the two cohorts

A total of 27 mothers took part in the fieldwork, which was conducted in the autumn of 2001. Seven mothers were involved in the preliminary semi-structured interviews and twenty in the main fieldwork of four focus groups. Fourteen participants experienced motherhood in the 1970s and fourteen in the 1990s, with one participant having experienced motherhood in both decades. As indicated, involvement in the fieldwork for a minority of participants (7) had been through telephone interviews, whereas 20 mothers had participated in the focus group discussions. A summary of the two generational cohorts is now provided, highlighting some biographical features which each generation broadly

shared. As indicated, claims about the statistical significance of the data they produced are not made with respect to wider populations. However, the insights which emerged about how they had constructed motherhood in their lives within their somewhat different socio-cultural settings may be claimed as broadly reflective of their generational norms.

For both data sets, family size reflected statistical norms with the cohort of 1970s mothers having an overall average of 2.2 children and the 1990s mothers an overall average of 1.7 children. However, it should be noted that these younger mothers may not have completed their families at the time of the research. The two generations had similar socio-economic profiles. The participants broadly fitted the Standard Occupational Classification categories 1, 2 and 3 (SOC, 2000). These categories include managers and senior officials, professional and technical occupations, all typically requiring post-school qualifications. The mothers' educational levels ranged from post-school certificates/diplomas to PhDs.

The professional backgrounds of the majority included university and college lecturers, school teachers, social workers, health professionals and administrators. Of the others, one participant was a trainer in the police service and one had a background in banking.

Another had worked in pharmaceuticals; one had trained as an actor; one was a civil servant and another had been a businesswoman. Additionally, one participant worked in information technology, a career she had trained for in later life. A total of 9 of the 27 participants had returned to study or trained for a second career since becoming mothers. Several had used time at home caring for children to re-engage with study, later joining occupational areas of greater interest to them than their original careers. Additionally, two mothers had retrained for as teachers, which better fitted family life.

All except two of the 1970s women had been in full-time careers when they became mothers, with around three-quarters giving up employment completely at this time. The majority of these mothers remained at home caring for their infant children until they were of school age and beyond (Joshi, 2008). There was then a gradual entry back into the labour force, primarily on part-time arrangements, a pattern of employment that the majority of the 1970s generation sustained into later life. As indicated above, some mothers of both generations used the years at home caring for their children to begin a process of returning to study and retraining for more family-friendly and/or interesting careers.

On the other hand, the majority of the 1990s generation of mothers did not take any significant time out of employment but balanced work and motherhood, with around two thirds returning to work before their first child was one year old, reflecting statistical norms (Melhuish, 2006). However, for most with infant children, this had been on part-time arrangements, typically with contracts of 20-30 hours a week and, for a small number, considerably less. A few described how they had been employed in less favourable arrangements with respect to work interest, job prospects and remuneration since going back part-time. This circumstance was found by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) and Watts (2007a) and discussed in some detail in Chapter 3. A small proportion of 1990s mothers, however, had opted for full-time motherhood, two for the reason that a return to their previous position had been impossible on part-time arrangements and a further three because they had chosen full-time motherhood, without regard to their career. A further factor of importance is that the majority of the 1990s generation had become mothers in their 30s, with several having developed careers to more advanced levels than their counterparts in the 1970s, though there were exceptions. For the most part, the 1970s

generation of women had given birth in their 20s at a time when careers were somewhat undeveloped.

Next, brief biographies are presented. Through individual profiles, glimpses into the lives of the participants are afforded. A personal quotation is recorded for each, to give a flavour of individual voice and perspective. The women's names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

3. Profiles: Participants involved in the preliminary fieldwork

(i) *The 1970s mothers*

Anthea

Before marrying and having her two children, the first in 1970, Anthea had ten years' experience working as a children's nurse in Britain and in the United States. Anthea described how she had followed the 'conventional stages' of engagement and marriage and then, 'after the statutory two years', her first child had been born. When her children were older Anthea had felt unwilling to return to work in the then 'regimented' systems of the NHS, so had retrained as a Breastfeeding Counsellor for the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), fitting this work around the needs of her family. Anthea described how, after several years in a career, she had found adjustment to motherhood quite difficult:

*I must say, coming from a job that had been very structured
I found it difficult as a mum to organise my day. I remember
having lots of cups of tea...*

Fiona

Fiona has two children. Prior to motherhood she had worked as a secretary, returning to her job after seven months, six of which constituted her annual leave, which she had saved

up. Whilst full-time work alongside motherhood had been difficult to manage, Fiona was clear that she always wanted to work. However, her husband had pressured her to give up work when she became pregnant for the second time, so she remained at home for three-and-a-half years. Being lonely, bored and unhappy with this situation, she had learned book-keeping and accountancy so she could take on short contracts working with business accounts from home:

I felt I wanted to work for myself, I didn't want to vegetate.

I kept my hand in by working on the bookkeeping. I didn't go to coffee mornings...

Geraldine

This participant offered insights into both generational contexts, having experienced motherhood in both decades in focus. Geraldine had married young, becoming pregnant with her first child in the late 1970s. Following divorce and remarriage she had produced a further three children in 1993, 1995 and 1998. In her first marriage, Geraldine recalled the 'assumption' that she would stay at home to support her husband's career. However, when she started her second family in the 1990s, she resumed employment after a minimum period of maternity leave. Even though she found the demands of travelling and the long hours 'punishing', this pattern was repeated with her next two children also. Eventually, she and her partner decided to switch roles, partly because he couldn't work due to ill health. Recently, however, Geraldine herself has given up going out to work, having made the decision to enjoy her children, to value motherhood and to seek alternative ways of earning a living from home:

What I have learned from my children is that I had forgotten to look at life the way they did...

(ii) *The 1990s mothers*

Bonnie

Bonnie was almost 30 when her daughter was born in 1999. While pregnant, she had made a determined plan to return to her job as nurse manager of a special clinical unit which she had been instrumental in setting up. She managed to negotiate a financial agreement for maternity leave with full pay for the first three months and a proportional amount for some months after. However, shortly after she began maternity leave, the company underwent a buy-out and Bonnie was informed that her job did not exist any more. She decided to 'test the water' and return to work. However, she was offered a lower status position on less pay though the work was virtually the same, so she took her case to the Employment Tribunal and won. However, in parallel with these legal proceedings, as a new mother Bonnie was coping with a baby who had required emergency surgery soon after birth. Life was very demanding so she looked at a part-time work option as a practical solution. However, she soon realised that such contracts offered the 'worst jobs' on 'poor pay' and with 'low status'. In the end, Bonnie decided not to return to work at all but to be a full-time mother, until her child was older. Bonnie said that her experiences had changed her perspective on motherhood:

*Motherhood has made me into a more confident person;
I would follow my own instincts now - not just listen to
others. I would stand up for what is right because being a
mum has made me realise what I believe in - it's made me
realise who I am, and given me confidence in a deep-down way.*

Claire

Claire had achieved a degree in psychology before training to become a special needs teacher. When pregnant, she decided to take some time out of her career to enjoy motherhood. However, Claire recalled how problems with her own health and with the baby's condition had caused early motherhood to be difficult and 'traumatic ... I wish I

could have been more relaxed early on... more independent of him'. Having no family living nearby and hardly any contact with her ex-colleagues, Claire reported that she had felt lonely in early motherhood and had relied a great deal on maintaining links with the NCT for friendship and support:

*It's such an important time of his [the baby's] life.
You certainly have to change the pace of the way
you think about things. Everything takes longer -
it's their pace and that's OK... I suppose I 'lost me'
quite a bit... I felt I wanted to be near him most of
the time- it was very intense ...
I miss work, but I don't regret leaving it...*

Diana

Diana was in her late thirties when she married, and her son was born in 1998. It was her husband's second marriage so for part of the time Diana takes on the role of stepmother to a further four children, which she finds to be 'an enriching experience'. In common with several of her peers, Diana has opted for flexible and consultancy work since having her child, feeling that she would have lost confidence if she hadn't 'kept up the idea of being good at something other than being a mum'. Diana gave some details of her strategies for keeping an identity separate from motherhood. These included earning money for herself, having her own work-space at home and using her maiden name for professional purposes. Diana recalled a sense of satisfaction in having managed to complete her MSc degree in the first year of her baby's life. This she had done by enlisting the help of a child-minder so she could find time to study. Diana enjoys the balance and contentment that her new life as a mother has brought:

*I feel I've mellowed tremendously. I'm not sure if
it's motherhood, or getting out of the high-powered
work environment. I was a stressed person, now not
so, and I enjoy the balance.*

Emma

Emma stayed in her job as a nurse until late into her pregnancy. She then took a full year off to care for her son. As her role in the hospital unit had been quite specialised, Emma's job was held open for her. When she returned to work it was on a pattern of one full day and two half days a week, with some shifts of up to twelve hours. Recently Emma reported that she had been required to do more of the longer shifts and believes this has unsettled her baby, who goes to a nursery. Emma had found the early months of motherhood both 'time-consuming' and 'engaging', but, by the time her baby was six months old she knew she wanted to return to work and 're-establish that part of my personality'. Reflecting on the choices of some of her peers, also mothers, who had made the decision to take more time out to be with their babies, Emma remarked: 'I inevitably compare myself with my peers: I ask, "Why don't they want to return?"'

*In past generations the child's right came first
and mothers' rights were secondary. In our
generation, our right is to keep up with our lives
and it's a child's right to have the most balanced
parent they can. If I hadn't gone back, I wouldn't
have held on to this...*

4. Profiles: Participants involved in the main fieldwork

(i) The 1970s Mothers, Nottingham

Barbara

In her late 50s, Barbara has two sons. Her career had been in pharmaceuticals, a job she gave up when she became pregnant. Some time after the birth of her sons, Barbara retrained as a teacher, a career she felt would fit better with the needs of her family. In the

early years of teaching she worked part-time. Barbara's husband died when her sons were in their teens and the loss to the family has been profound, especially for one son, whose behaviour since has been problematic. Barbara recalled the important role which the boys' father had played in the life of the family:

Certainly my husband loved children, I think more so than I. You know, supposedly as a mother... I was quite happy to look after the children, as one did, but he idolised the children, and the boys, they certainly idolised him...

Janet

In her early 50s, Janet is a social worker, having retrained for this career as a mature student. She married very young in the early 1970s and had two children soon afterwards. Janet recalled how there was very little paid maternity leave available at the time - just six weeks before confinement and six weeks after. Her mother, though then in her late 60s, looked after the children so Janet could remain in full-time work. This was partly for financial reasons, as her partner had not yet completed his engineering apprenticeship. He was on low pay and on permanent night shifts. Janet recalled the difficulty of their life at that time:

We developed a pattern of me getting up, getting the baby ready, my husband taking it to my mother's and then he went to bed and I left for work and then we had a quick tea together and then he went off to work and I was left with the baby in the evening. Sounds horrendous but it worked reasonably well. The downside was, I never really got to know my son very well...

Betty

In her late 50s, Betty has a family of 4, all close in age. The first was born in the late 1960s when Betty left work to become a full-time mother. In middle life, Betty experienced serious health problems but has managed to build a second career and now works full-time

in the Civil Service. Entering into the discussion about the frustrations of full-time motherhood and the choices women have to make, Betty recalled having been philosophical about her situation:

I think once I'd got the four of them it took a lot of the frustration out of it because there was no other strategy but I'd just got to get on with it and bring the children up. I think it's sometimes when you've got options ... you can have too much choice sometimes, can't you?

Joan

Joan was born overseas in a former British colony and gave birth to the first of her two children in 1978. She found that she needed to give up her career in social work once the children were born, though she had done this with some reluctance. Joan described how, when the children came along, both she and her partner would have liked to have worked part-time and share the childcare, but it had not worked out that way. When the children were older Joan returned to her career on a part-time basis, a pattern of work she has sustained:

Although even then we knew it was probably not possible... expectations were very different ... you know, the sort of work/life balance ... Now it certainly wasn't the way it turned out, needless to say I actually took five years off work and then went back part-time and have remained part-time ... I feel my career actually, well, really suffered.

Viv

A teacher in her early 50s, Viv has two sons born several years apart. Viv related in graphic detail her difficulties of adjusting to motherhood, not least because she had found she was pregnant the week of her university finals. She and her boyfriend married soon after. Viv found life as a full-time mother very frustrating as she longed for a career. She was also very much like a single parent as the baby's father, in addition to working full-

time, was as a semi-professional sportsman and away most weekends. Viv soon established a career in teaching, but early motherhood for her had been a very frustrating and unhappy experience:

My own perspective is that I had motherhood thrust upon me, which is why motherhood changed me as a person. I mean I think I probably lacked confidence in every way to take on all these difficult roles and conform to expectations.

Jill

Jill married soon after leaving university and had the first of her four children in the late 1960s. In common with many of her peers, Jill turned her back on a career when she became a mother. Now, in later life, Jill is a full-time university academic:

My peers were all doing the same thing when I left university. My tutor said to me - you're not going to believe this - he said 'And what do you propose to do when you finish here?' And I said, simpering, heaven help me! I said 'I'm going to get married' and he said 'An excellent career for a woman!'

Since taking part in the research, Jill, who had been living with cancer, has died.

(ii) The 1970s mothers, London

Sue

In her mid-50s, Sue is an IT consultant. She has a family of two, born in 1974 and 1976. In the early years of motherhood she was rarely employed, but took the opportunity to take courses which she thought might develop her while she was at home. Sue recalled feeling 'very refreshed' when she returned to work full-time. Her recollection of early motherhood was that she had coped fairly well with her first child but found life difficult when the second came along, having little time and space for herself:

I can remember thinking the only time you have to yourself was when you were in the shower...

Jackie

Jackie has a family of three, two children born in the 1970s and one in the 1980s. She is in her early 50s and currently works on flexible hours as an ante-natal teacher for the NCT, having been one of their post-natal support volunteers for several years. Before she had children Jackie ran her own business, but once her first baby was born, opted for full-time motherhood. In the focus group she prioritised the topic card: 'My child as the centre of concern', explaining her reasons:

I wanted to do a very different style of parenting, or mothering, from that which I experienced. My perception was that my sister and myself weren't accepted as the centre of my parents' concern, so I wanted to try and do something sort of different ... I think it was a positive choice to do that.

Judy

Judy has a son and a daughter, both born in the mid-1970s. For many years, Judy has worked on part-time contracts in further and higher education settings. Now in her late 50s, Judy recalls that she has operated this kind of work pattern since she gave up full-time teaching during pregnancy. When her children were in their infancy she worked very little. Whilst content about this decision, she recalled the loneliness of early motherhood. She also communicated a sense that, in motherhood, her personal needs were drowned out and described one occasion when all she could find in her make-up bag was a plastic fried egg from her small daughter's cooking set. Her response at the time had been:

This has gone far enough!

Hilary

Hilary is in her early 60s and works as an adult education lecturer. She had her first child in the 1960s. Following divorce and a second marriage in the 1970s, she had two further

children. Hilary recalled the powerful message from society to women when they became mothers:

Having a child was really important. Being a mother was what I was there for, really ... make a good marriage and then you have a child and that's what it was about and so, certainly at that point, I was doing what was expected of me - I was brainwashed!

Marie

Now in her late 50s, Marie came to Britain from Europe some thirty years ago. Although feeling unsupported by the children's father she recalled the enjoyment of caring for her two children, both born in the early 1970s, and doing courses to keep mentally active at the same time. Once her children were older Marie retrained for a new career. She recalled that her mother had been an important role model for her:

My mother was a good mother and I wanted to be good to the children. I don't know if I was but it was important to be with them, and there was a time when they would go to school and I would be able to do what I did.

.....

(iii) *The 1990s mothers, Nottingham*

Jenny

Jenny has one child, born in the late 1990s. She is a trained actress, taking up contracts in theatre and television as and when these become available. In between she works as an administrator. Jenny hopes to have a second child, but finances are difficult as her partner is a full-time student. For this reason she took a shorter period of maternity leave than she would have wished. Jenny spoke out for motherhood but feels that the role has very low status in society:

We've got very low status outside the home. It's weird,

because we live in a very child-centred world, everything is geared towards children nowadays, but not towards mothers...

Jane

Jane has two children, both born in the early 1990s. Before she became a mother she worked at management level in banking. Jane described herself as 'something of a perfectionist' in everything she does. For this reason, and because she had experienced difficulty negotiating part-time hours, Jane had decided she would not work until her children were at school. Jane considered herself fortunate that her husband earned a good salary so from a financial point of view she was able to make the decision to be a full-time mother. Once her children were at school she decided to train for a new career, and she is now a special needs teacher:

I've either got to do it perfectly, or I didn't want to know, and it was like that for the first year or so after having my son and I got myself into such a state and such a tizz!

Debbie

Debbie is in her early 30s and has one daughter aged 3. Her partner has given up his job to take over their daughter's care, after both parents had worked full time using a nursery for childcare. Debbie works as a trainer for the police service, which frequently necessitates nights away from home. Debbie is of the opinion that her work environment is not family friendly. Wishing to have more time for motherhood, she has tried to negotiate reduced hours, but the management have been very resistant. She described her experience as:

A one-woman battle against the police service!

Maxine Maxine is in her 30s and has one child, born in the mid-1990s. She works part-time as an administrator. She gave up full-time work after the birth of her baby, returning only

for a short time to fulfil maternity leave arrangements. When she had her baby she had felt secure in her wish to take adequate time from the workplace to be a mother, especially as it was unlikely she would have any more children (she had been married for several years before she got pregnant with her son). At the time of making her decision to be a full-time mother, Maxine recalled the pressure from her peers for her to return to the workplace:

Really you know if you're just a mum, or a full-time mum, people just sort of (say) 'You should be staying part-time or (doing) a more important job really' ... that motherhood's just something you do in the background.

(iv) *The 1990s mothers, London*

Liz

Liz, a university lecturer in her mid 30s, has two children, one born in the early 1990s, the other 8 years later. Not being established in a career when her first child came along, as she was just completing her PhD, made life extra difficult for Liz. She and her partner were short of money and she also felt pressured by her peers to get back to her career as soon as possible. Liz described how, when her child was a few months old, she got a temporary lectureship on a job-share arrangement with her partner. This was in a city many miles from where they lived, meaning that both were involved in a considerable amount of travelling which they had to cope with alongside the pressures of new parenthood:

People I met as a result of my job ... it was actually more difficult not to go back to work... it was just assumed that's what you would do...

Yasmin

In her late 30s and with children aged 5 and 2, Yasmin was born of immigrant parents who had come to the UK several years ago from a former British colony. Yasmin is a lecturer in higher education, but since returning to employment after having her second child, has worked on part-time contracts only to fit in with the needs of the family. Yasmin shared with the group her response to becoming a mother, when her intention had been not to:

It's very strange this 'becoming a mother', I 'fell into it'.

I was never going to become a mother. I was never going to get married either, because my parents divorced when I was twelve and I made a conscious decision that I would never get married.

I would never have children, because I wouldn't want my children to suffer what we suffered and ... Here I am, in my late thirties, sitting here with like-minded women, talking about marriage and motherhood and trying to combine [all] the roles!

Cathy

Cathy is a college lecturer and has three children. At around 50 years of age she was the oldest participant of the 1990s generation of mothers involved in the research. Alongside motherhood Cathy maintained part-time work on a job share arrangement, an opportunity which, whilst difficult to achieve, she greatly valued. Cathy related the profound state of tiredness she experienced when her children were young, when, as an older mother, she had tried to combine work and motherhood:

A lot of times, feeling exhausted, and I just felt... having my children, feeling exhausted ... a bit of me put that down to leaving it until I was in my 30s!

Anna

Anna is in her 30s. She has two children of 5 and 4 years of age. When Anna's second child was just a few weeks old her first child was diagnosed as having cerebral palsy due to extreme prematurity. Anna, feeling she must do all she could to give him the best chance for healthy development, put her youngest child with a childminder for part of the week so she could attend medical and therapeutic appointments with her eldest son. Since having children, Anna has neither wished nor needed to go out to work. Her partner earns a very good salary so they can afford for her to make that choice. Also, having waited for some time to be a mother she wanted to engage with the role full-time. Anna enjoys motherhood

and recalled her excitement at the birth of her first child after the disappointment of several miscarriages:

*I'd had a pretty awful pregnancy and you know,
I'd miscarried four times before, so he was a
great result for me... I had a live baby!*

Rosie

Rosie works as a designer and university lecturer. She is in her 40s and has three children of 12, 9 and 6. Rosie described how she had always wanted to manage a career alongside motherhood and to succeed well in both. However, her parallel life has not been easy:

*I always knew I wanted children. I couldn't envisage not
having them, but I always say it's about 'Having it all'...
I want to be top of my profession, I want to be good, and
I can't ... I don't know how to do both!*

5. Conclusion

In the three chapters which follow, with close reference to the data, individual experiences of motherhood are revealed in some variety and detail. However, because the main fieldwork was conducted in groups, as discussed, a shared meaning-making is evident. Despite this, individual voices remain prominent, for the participants communicate their experiences openly and with candour.

The grounded theory process of data analysis revealed the critical issues for the mothers, indicating three overarching themes. These were: *Social Trends*; *Positioning Motherhood* and *Mothers, Babies and Others: Intervention and support*. The discussions in the following three chapters therefore are marshalled under these themes. Certain cross-thematic categories are also in evidence, for example 'motherhood and work' and

‘motherhood role status’, these are considered within the different thematic categories as appropriate.

Chapter 6

Social Trends

*The Sociological imagination enables us to grasp
history and biography and the relation between the
two in society*

(Wright-Mills, 1978: 12)

1. Introduction

At different points in history society has had different requirements of women, and of mothers, with change in the lives of aspirant women in a late 20th century context being of noteworthy significance (Popillion, 2000). This research focuses on perceptions of motherhood as constructed by a sample of professional and semi-professional women in their somewhat contrasting settings of the 1970s and 1990s.

Three themes emerged from the data, and this chapter focuses on the first of these: *Social Trends*. Participant observation concerning time-specific norms and values influencing constructions of motherhood in the 1970s opens the discussion, with questions of role status, paid work and childcare then examined in some detail. The mothers' reflections on women's increasing desire to remain economically independent in a context of growing partnership breakdown are then presented, followed by consideration of children's socialisation in a context of the changing lives of parents.

A later section returns to the key drivers identified by the participants as having influenced the ways they had perceived motherhood with critical generational differences highlighted. A late modern claim to freedom for individuals to choose their own life paths (Giddens,

1991) is seen as somewhat challenged in the mothers' accounts of economic and normative constraint.

2. Women's roles: Traditional discourses

*I think before the 1970s there weren't
many questions about motherhood*

(Marie, 1970s mother)

The majority of the 1970s generation of mothers in the research were born during or just after the Second World War. Their formative years were framed by the economic privations of wartime and post-war Britain. Bringing to life this context, some 1970s mothers reflected on the lives of their own mothers many of whom had been employed during wartime. However, once the war was over and men returned to their former occupations, their lives were constrained once more to the private sphere of home and family, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Storkey, 1985).

There were other pressures on post-war mothers too, as Viv explained:

We had [a need for] the repopulation of the nation which is an important thing, which is why you have your free orange juice, your free milk ... Part of it was the motherhood ethos of security... families had just come through a ghastly war and consequently that had a huge influence on them ... 'the home' became a very venerated thing...

Alongside these post-war realities, 1970s mother Joan recognised the strength of normative pressure on women to be full-time mothers, especially in a middle class environment:

I think my mother sort of adhered to the rules of the generation before and probably the one before that. I mean it was just assumed that as soon as you became a mother, you stopped any work outside the home. Any work you did was at home and you just devoted yourself, you know, to full-time motherhood.

Barbara, also a 1970s mother, concurred with Joan's view. Her own mother had given up work once she married because it was 'the done thing'. However, Barbara was of the opinion that she would have had a more satisfying life by remaining in employment, a view unacceptable to her father who always maintained that Barbara's mother had never *wanted* to work. Barbara recalled challenging her father's reading of the situation: 'Well, you didn't know my mother very well, because she said to me "I often wondered if I would have liked to [work]..."'.

The observations of several 1970s participants revealed that post-war family life for them had been constructed for the most part on a traditional model of women as full-time wives and mothers, supporting men as fathers and breadwinners in their career endeavours, sacrificing their personal needs and aspirations to this end. In this regard, the 1970s mothers also recalled the influence of infant attachment theory and its powerful message concerning children's early needs and how these might best be met by mothers remaining at home (Bowlby, 1953; Winnicott, 1960).

At the same time, the data indicated that early adulthood for the 1970s generation of mothers was experienced on the threshold of social transition, driven not least by a feminist discourse linked to a wider social agenda for equal rights (Friedan, 1963; Firestone, 1979). However, it would be the years somewhat beyond the 1970s before feminist discourse really began to influence the life choices of the majority. For example, Jill, a mother of four, revealed strikingly traditional views in a conversation she recalled with her tutor when she was about to leave university:

When I left university, my tutor said to me - you're not going to believe this - he said: 'And what do you propose to do when you finish here?' And I said, simpering,

heaven help me, I said, 'I'm going to get married'. And he said 'An excellent career for a woman!'

'Was this tongue in cheek?' someone asked.

Jill: Not at all ... the 'ideal' was told us, over and over again: 'Educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a family' ... We were prevailed upon to have a lot of children and it was the ethic that we could then populate the world with intelligent, educated children. All my friends had at least four children, it was the norm.

Jill had become a mother for the first time in the 1960s, which might explain her views. In later life, she changed her ideological positioning on these matters, however. Overall, the contributions of the 1970s mothers gave insights into their (willing or unwilling) affirmation of women's traditional role, a discourse reaffirmed in a post-war context of rebuilding and regeneration (Innes, 1995). However, for the women who became mothers in the 1990s the social context was very different. In this decade, the perception was that motherhood might be postponed and then constructed in very different ways alongside other roles. For a growing majority of aspirant women, career, an enjoyable life and enough money to realise these would take priority over having children, at least in the first decade or so of establishing their careers (ICM: 2006).

3. Some factors influencing motherhood role construction

In several ways the choices around motherhood for the two separate generations involved in the research were revealed as reflecting normative trends concerning how motherhood should be constructed in their lives (Oakley, 1974; Wilkinson, 1994). However, a minority of each generation in the research, as in the population as a whole, had challenged these norms.

The majority of the 1970s women in the study had become mothers in their 20s, whereas first time motherhood for the 1990s women had generally occurred in their 30s, and, in one case, 40s. There is statistical indication that having children at an older age results in smaller families (Brown, 2004). In general, it was observed that the 1970s mothers had produced larger families than the 1990s mothers, though it was assumed that some of the younger generation may have produced more children in the years following their participation in the research (as discussed in the previous chapter).

The participants had career backgrounds in professions like teaching and social work remaining relatively unaffected by the employment fluctuations evident in a post-industrial Britain. Innes (1995: 37) observes: 'Coalminers have become less common than university graduates; car workers than child-minders, but women doing "women's work" and men doing "men's work" has changed very little'. An increasing number of mothers made an early return to employment as the 1980s progressed into the 1990s (Melhuish, 2006). With respect to the family economy, evidence from the data supports other findings that a growing policy assumption of 'two-salary households' served in part to cause an upward trend of housing costs in the 1990s, generating increasing difficulty for families to meet mortgage payments on just one salary (Lewis, 2002). However, organising work contracts which would mesh with family life was reported by several 1990s mothers as difficult to achieve. This issue is considered after the question of motherhood role status has been considered, next.

4. Motherhood role status

In the past, there was a status to motherhood

(Jill, 1970s mother)

I don't think it's given very high status.

Really, you know, if you're just a mum ...

(Maxine, 1990s mother)

The above quotations illustrate contrasting generational perceptions of motherhood role status between the separate groups of mothers. However, the data revealed a greater complexity of perception than these words might suggest, as will become apparent. For the majority of the 1970s mothers, for better or worse, motherhood had been their primary role, at least in their children's infancy. Evidence from the data suggests that some had been content with this role at the heart of family life, viewing it as a necessary sacrifice and appreciated by society at the time. However, others had felt overly constrained by full-time motherhood, viewing it as low status and restrictive of personal ambition. A few of these 1970s mothers had therefore taken up paid work yet recalled disapproval from their peers for so doing. This was the situation for Geraldine, who described herself as: '...from continental Europe, so perhaps at the time more liberated than most'. When in the late 1970s she took a part-time job, she observed that for the women in her social circle this had 'seemed to undermine their role as full-time wives and mothers: they appeared to feel threatened and to be asking "What is she trying to do here?"'

Notwithstanding earlier perceptions of full-time motherhood as an appropriate role for educated, intelligent women (Myrdal and Klein, 1968), some of the 1970s mothers in the research recalled having a sense of being in an invisible 'non-role'. Hilary, for example, remembered being asked what she 'did' at dinner parties found herself replying in terms of: 'I used to...' or, 'I've just finished...'. In contrast, 1970s mother Jackie had been more assertive about the importance of her role as a mother: 'For me, motherhood *was* work, it

was my final work that I *could* do and *wanted* to do'. As a child, Jackie's own care had been supplied by nannies, so she determined, when a mother herself, that her children would have a very different experience. In her contribution, Jackie acknowledged the different norms and values operating for the generation of mothers which followed: 'I think that society today finds full-time motherhood unacceptable'. Of modern women, her opinion was that 'most people can't carry it' (being full-time mothers).

For their part, some of the 1990s generation felt that a choice of full-time motherhood, even if this was their desire and an economically viable option, would not be respected in modern times. In consideration of this question, other research by James (2007: 229) quotes one woman as saying: 'Work defines your identity here: after a child is 18 months old, a full-time mother would be a social disaster. She would be a pariah at dinner parties.' The discussion between 1990s mothers Jenny, Maxine and Jane endorsed this perception of low status:

Jenny: *We've got very low status outside the home. It's weird because we live in a very child-centred world, everything is geared towards children nowadays, but not mothers...*

Maxine agreed, having a view that modern mothers felt constrained to be 'part-time' along with 'another more important job' (like work). For their generation, it was Maxine's view that motherhood was 'not a proper role to be respected', but 'just something you do in the background'. Jane concurred:

I think that's right ... because I work part-time in school with special needs children and if anyone asks me what I do, I say, 'I'm a special needs teacher', I don't say 'I'm a mum, but I do a few hours in school'. It's not that way round.

Jenny asked Jane if she would say that she was a 'special needs teacher and a mother'. Jane replied that she would not mention being a mother at all, because: 'If you're just a mum,

then you're *just* a mum ...'. Jane illustrated her point with reference to television quiz shows where the contestants introduce themselves as 'Oh, I'm just a mum', or, 'I'm just a housewife': 'It's that word "Just!"'. Maxine agreed, noting a prevailing message that 'Anybody can do it' [motherhood]. Jenny concluded the discussion with her observation that some women 'seem as if they're ashamed of it'.

Across the focus groups participants from both generations recognised and resented the low status afforded to motherhood, a finding endorsed in the literature (see especially Innes, 1995). Yet, at times, the women's own views of motherhood in a sense colluded with a perception of low status. For example, 1970s mother, Barbara, shared in her group that her son was planning to be a 'house-husband'. Barbara revealed her personal perception of its low status and limited scope by saying 'It *could* happen, but, I mean, he'd need more out of life than that!' Ridgeway and Correll (2004) make the broader point that both paid and unpaid care roles are held in low esteem in late modern society.

Whilst several participants recognised the diminishing status of motherhood, nonetheless, the data revealed that several viewed motherhood as a 'critical' role. However, in agreement with findings in research by Weaver and Ussher (1997) the participants recognised that when a woman is labeled pejoratively by society as 'just a mother', it has the effect of devaluing her and the complex role she has to perform:

Yasmin: Motherhood is undervalued, neglected and just ignored, so you don't actually feel you're doing a really important job. Whereas, in fact, that is what you're doing ... without it, the whole of society will crumble.

Although perceived as having diminishing status in society, there was agreement that motherhood seemed to be 'getting tougher'. At the same time, support networks were felt

to be diminishing. One 1990s participant thought that prospective mothers may well ask: 'Is it worth it?'

An idea introduced in Chapter 2 (Tesch, 1990; Gilligan, 1997; Stainton Rogers, 2003) of roles as constructed from the requirements of particular social contexts was endorsed in significant ways in the research. For example, the diminishing status of motherhood in society it was suggested by some participants as having influenced their choice to retain some semblance of a career. The further important issues of role satisfaction and role balance between motherhood and paid work are discussed in some detail in the chapter that follows. For now, it is important to acknowledge that social discourse was not the only influence on the way women constructed and balanced their roles, because financial considerations played an increasingly important part in their decision-making. It is to this matter that I now turn.

5. Economic considerations

Recent data highlights the increasingly high cost of raising a child to age 21 as having reached £180,000 if university education is included (Bennett, 2006). The discussion which follows considers what the participants had to say about the economic realities of their lives once a baby became part of the household. The financial implications of being a non-earning mother are first discussed. This is followed by a section looking at employment and motherhood in relation to participant experience. The rising cost of modern living was noted by several 1990s mothers as having influenced what they considered to be a premature return to work, alongside a need to have spending power in the context of a growing consumerism in late modern society (Wilkinson, 1994). Later, attention is given to what the women had to say about how increasing partnership

also heightened their resolve to hold on to a measure of financial independence (Innes, 1995).

(i) Full-time motherhood

As indicated, being out of the workplace during their children's infancy was the norm for the majority of the 1970s mothers involved in the research. However, around a third of the 1990s participants also made the decision to remain at home full-time with their infant children. Two of these had partners earning salaries high enough to make this choice financially unproblematic. For example, 1990s mother Jane said: 'I had five years off and I wouldn't have missed it for the world and I felt very privileged that I could, not everyone *can* make that decision, but I really *wanted* to stay at home.' For full-time mother, Maxine, however, her family had experienced several privations by trying to manage on one salary. For example, they had remained in a house smaller than they required so the mortgage would be manageable on one salary; Maxine gave up her car, and recalled 'dreading it when we ran out of toiletries'.

The data indicate that an early return to work by 1990s mothers well before their child's first birthday to a significant extent had been economically driven, though peer pressure and cultural values also played a part. For the majority of the 1970s mothers, however, whilst finances had been tight, the primacy of motherhood in their lives was normatively affirmed, so most had not gone out to work. Their partners had been the family breadwinners, not least out of an assumption of their superior earning capacity. However, no such assumptions were made by the 1990s mothers, the salaries of a significant number of whom made up a substantial proportion of the family income.

But material privations were apparently not the only negative outcome for non-working mothers. 1970s mother, Hilary, for example, recalled her loss of personal self-esteem as the non-earning partner. For this reason, she had needed to feel that her partner's salary was '*ours*, genuinely *ours*' so had insisted that she retained her separate bank balance and that her husband should pay into this a monthly allowance. Some of the other 1970s mothers recalled how having their own money had enhanced their sense of being valued. Judy, for example, described taking on some private language tuition to this end: 'I forget what she paid me but *I was delighted* because it was the *first* money of my *own* that I'd had for six months ... I remember going out and buying a parasol for the baby; but never mind!' This perhaps serves to demonstrate a psychological priority for women as mothers.

Some words from Sue, a 1970s mother, conclude this discussion with reflections on the economic pressures on modern mothers:

Thinking about the young mothers today, they haven't the choice, they are financially committed ... and I just feel immensely pleased and privileged that I was able to leave work and spend most of their preschool time with them.

(ii) *Employed mothers*

For the younger generation of women involved in this research, the choice of staying at home to care for their babies was not an option. The 1990s mothers described the ever-present challenge of trying to manage the family budget, citing the rising cost of housing which they put down partly to an assumption of 'two-earner' families. They described also the high cost of child-care and the material upkeep of their expanding families each requiring considerable financial planning and personal discipline. 1990s mother Debbie remarked: 'I used to be able to spend money quite freely, but now, I can't ... but that's a good discipline really, because I could spend for England!'

Several of the 1990s mothers returned to work immediately after maternity leave, most on part-time arrangements. This meant a cut in salary and in some cases a diminished level of work quality and status, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004; Watts, 2007a). Wider issues in relation to employment are considered in more detail in section 6, below. For now, changes in employment arrangements post-motherhood are acknowledged. Part-time employment, providing considerably less remuneration and often in positions of less seniority had meant a diminished standard of living for some. However, these women saw it as imperative to maintain some of the small but important material elements of their pre-motherhood lives, as Jenny explains:

I don't know if I could have given up the sort of basic things like having a bottle of wine every once in a while, getting my hair cut every two months... And you know, especially when you're a new mum, these things like buying a new lipstick, they somehow become quite important you know, being able to treat yourself and have something new and looking after yourself ... To give that up as well would have been incredibly difficult.

Wilkinson's (1994) observation, noted earlier, that as the 1980s progressed into the 1990s, women's purchasing priorities changed towards goods deemed essential to maintaining personal image and identity informs further discussion of the data, below.

Additional expenditure for working mothers, extra to the costs of running a home and family, can include childcare, a second car, clothes for maintaining a smart appearance at work, cleaning help, and, with less time to cook, the purchase of ready-made meals. Even so, evidence from the data overall suggests that those who maintained their pre-motherhood full-time work roles generally found they were considerably better off than the non-earning or part-time working mothers had been. However, Geraldine, who had the first of her children in the 1970s and three more in the 1990s, eventually gave up her full-time job. Her reasons were several but included the financial cost incurred by working. Her

view was that the more children you have, the more likely you are to find that 'financially, parenting invokes a negative balance ... and the more you think: "Is it [financially] worth it?"'

(iii) Consumerism

People have different attitudes to material possessions. Today, people must have!
(Anthea, 1970s mother)

Clear generational contrasts emerged from the data with respect to the importance of material possessions. For example, some 1990s mothers highlighted the desirability of an 'appropriate' lifestyle by being able to afford certain goods and services in late modern society. As indicated above, this endorses earlier research into British values cited in Wilkinson (1994), which reveals a strengthening of more outer-directed values expressed through the values of consumerism and attention to personal image. Some of the 1970s mothers in the study were unsympathetic to this trend, however, adopting the 'moral high ground' when recalling their own material privations. 1970s mother, Janet, for example, described her situation as a new mother:

People nowadays are much more materialistic... I mean ... talk about 'living in poverty' But I always felt that we ate well and we paid the bills. The carpet comprised of a rug in front of the fire and the curtains were all second-hand, or on loan. We didn't have the tele, the video, the new car - I think people 'expect' these days ... I don't know whether it's their own personal comfort, or whether they see it as some kind of status symbol, or what We got there in dribs and drabs, we didn't have the expectations...

Gill Kirby of the Centre for Policy Studies endorses Janet's views with respect to the social norms and expectations of present-day mothers in contrast to those of a generation earlier. Kirby notes that even though the 1970s generation of women were more likely to become

pregnant in their 20s, often in economically difficult circumstances, they had coped and had not seemed to mind: 'You weren't looking for the world before you had your children!' (BBC *Woman's Hour*: 4.10.06).

Geraldine also noted the contrasts between the cultural values of the 1990s and those of families a generation earlier: 'We had hardly anything ... now, *however* much poverty there is in the family, there's always a brand new pram!' 1970s mothers Marie and Judy made similar observations, but reflected on the possibility that the current desire for possessions comes from 'society' rather than from women's personal views of what is really necessary in their lives. Powerful socio-cultural constructions, of need as well as of role, have presented important conceptual frameworks for this research. In conclusion of this section, it is noted that whilst in some ways critical of the increasing materialism of modern society, the 1970s mothers were for the most part sympathetic towards the 1990s generation with respect to the considerable cost of bringing up a family in more recent times.

(iv) *Retaining economic independence*

*I think there is an element in that women want to make
sure if anything happens they can manage on their own*

(Judy 1970s mother)

The following brief discussion considers the views of the participants concerning a social trend influencing women's commitment to retaining financial independence. This is the incidence of partnership breakdown. The 1970s mothers had most to say on this matter. It appeared that some had experienced divorce themselves, or had observed situations where women had been economically trapped in unsatisfactory relationships. Judy explains:

I know when my sister's marriage broke up, my mother said: 'I don't like it, I don't like it at all!' And then she said 'I'd have left if I'd had some money!' And I thought among my relatives about some who were really beastly to each other and I thought the women were trapped economically ... and I think there's an element in that women want to make sure that if anything happens, they can manage on their own.

Additional to this factor, some participants observed how elements of modern life can place increasing strain on family relationships. They cited the growing incidence of both parents spending substantial parts of the day away from home, children and each other, and a not insubstantial number of women earning more than their partners. These factors are recognised by Innes (1995) as influencing partnership breakdown. 1970s mother, Marie, suggested a pragmatic way forward, giving the example of her own daughter who cohabits with a long-term partner. Marie described how, although the mortgage of their flat is paid for out of a pooled account, everything else is kept separate and clearly defined. Marie, herself divorced, went on: 'I think she learned that from me. You should never give up too much because it's difficult to sort out if you *do* separate.' Marie concluded with her view that women as mothers must maintain a measure of financial independence in whatever way they can, not least through paid work.

In summary, economic imperatives, combined with changing values and practices in the later years of the 20th century, were recognised by the participants as having influenced their role constructions and personal perceptions as mothers and as persons. They noted additionally how family and fiscal policies have gradually eroded the importance of their role as mothers. In contrast, the implementation of Family Allowance in the early period of the Welfare State was recognised by Judy as, in a sense, having endorsed motherhood:

It was a really, really important gesture on behalf of the state, paid to the mother as a sort of 'reward'... After all, this is the future generation and you want to do a

good job for them; it's very, very important, not just for you but for society and it does need to be recognised, but it isn't ... to be respected for what we do ... This pushing us to work all the time, I'm sure must make people feel that the role of parent is not that important!

6. Motherhood and the workplace

Returning to the workplace in the first year of their children's lives was a common circumstance for the 1990s generation of mothers, as discussed. The issues of negotiating/renegotiating work contracts with employers and changes in job specification and status when returning part-time have been considered in some detail in Chapter 3 with reference to the literature. Workplace culture was a further area considered, with some occupations highlighted as somewhat problematic for mothers. These issues are now reconsidered in the light of what emerged from the data.

(i) Employment conditions and motherhood

I believe workplace arrangements are against mothers

(Bonnie 1990s mother)

The majority of the 1990s mothers recalled having difficulty in pregnancy addressing the question of post-motherhood work arrangements. This was exacerbated when, as is often the case, arrangements needed to be firmly set in place long before the critical variables of life with a new baby could be known.

Bonnie had been certain that she wanted to return to her full-time job at the end of maternity leave. However, when her baby required emergency surgery at a few weeks old, followed by a period of special care, Bonnie found herself beginning to change her mind. As the date for returning to her job approached she found herself unable to decide what to do. Her employer, however, was unsympathetic and put pressure on her to make a quick

decision about whether or not she would return on the agreed date: 'I said I couldn't make a decision until we'd got over the crisis with the baby's health'. In the event, Bonnie discovered that her employer had not waited for her decision but had gone ahead and advertised her job. Once she felt that her baby was in good health, Bonnie decided to 'test the water' by returning to work. She contacted her employer but was informed that she would be offered a different and lower status job, her original position having been filled. She took her case to the Employment Tribunal and won.

In the end, Bonnie rejected the idea of returning to work full-time until her baby was older. She also rejected the idea of part-time work: 'It's low status, you get the worst jobs and it's poor pay'. The negative features of part-time work have been discussed earlier with reference to the literature (see, for example, recent work by Watts, 2007a).

From the earlier generation of mothers, Fiona described the unfavourable employment conditions and lack of protection that she and other employed mothers experienced at that time. Fiona had begun her working life as a secretary and recalled, when appointed, having been made to enter into an agreement with her boss not to have children for five years. To a 1990s generation Fiona thought this situation would be inconceivable, but: 'In my time there was no one to protect anyone like me, the media wasn't interested ... we were seen as "domestic" and not important or interesting'.

For some 1990s mothers however, as indicated, a major area of concern was having to decide how to balance work and motherhood in a context of uncertainty about what motherhood would mean, a situation recognised by Kitzinger (2004). In this regard, Liz recalled a conversation she had with the personnel officer at her university:

She asked 'Is this your first?' and I said 'No, it's my second' and she said 'Oh well, you probably will come back then; you know what you're about. A lot of women

come to me and they say "I'll be back six weeks after it's born" and they don't know, they don't know what it's going to be like ... Lots of them don't come back'.

Hakim (1996) remarks that women's private intentions are not always the same as the formal notification they give their employers. However, Curley (2004) notes a higher than average number of women university employees returning after maternity leave. Liz explained that, in her case, she *had* in fact returned to her lecturing post, as agreed, yet in some ways wished she had not, finding the combination of motherhood and academic life both difficult and stressful.

Whilst both generations of research participants were broadly in agreement that new laws implemented in more recent times have brought improvements in women's rights in relation to work arrangements, they noted the persistence of certain problems such as when mothers have to pay back maternity money if they change their minds about returning to work. With respect to increasing the duration of paid maternity leave, 1990s mother, Jenny said she was planning to wait until at least 2003 before having another baby as she had heard that the duration of paid maternity leave would, by then, have increased. She calculated that if she added to this some allowable months of unpaid leave she would be able to remain at home with a second baby for much longer than had been either affordable or allowable with her first child (born in 1999). This perhaps serves to demonstrate how social policy (and anticipated social policy) can influence personal decision-making.

Several of the 1990s generation of mothers expressed a firm wish that workplace arrangements could be made more flexible in a pattern better to integrate with motherhood. Some participants, finding that for them, an appropriate balance had not been possible, had opted out of the workplace altogether until their children were at school. Maxine, for example, said: 'I've got a lot to give, to bring to a job, if somebody could accommodate

...'. Jane agreed, remarking that a part-time work pattern of 10 to 3 o'clock would fit better with the school day. It is recorded that working mothers have a clear preference for the part-time working day to mesh with school hours (ESDS, 1995).

However, one focus group of 1990s mothers thought that special arrangements set in place for mothers could work against them if the rights and wishes of childless colleagues were not also acknowledged. 1990s mother Jane cited the example of her 32-year-old sister, who had chosen not to have children herself yet felt discriminated against when special arrangements were made for parents such as when they were given first choice of holiday dates or allowed to leave the workplace early for their children. The consensual view of Jane's focus group was that it was not right for special arrangements for parents to limit the rights and opportunities of childless employees. The negative implications for employers of being required to build in flexibility for parents working in small and medium-sized businesses should be recognised too, the mothers felt. One further problem with flexible and part-time work arrangements which emerged in the discussions was that when special adjustments are made for parents this can serve to militate against their best interests by positioning them as less serious and committed. This factor was discussed in Chapter 3 with reference to findings in the literature (Cockburn, 1991; Watts, 2007a).

(ii) *Part-time/job-share arrangements*

*I wanted to be both: I wanted to be a mum,
but I wanted to carry on with the job I was doing.*

(Cathy, 1990s mother)

Only a minority of mothers in the study had managed to arrange job-share arrangements sustaining the professional levels of their pre-motherhood work roles. Job-sharing the same or a similar job with a pro-rata salary was viewed by several participants as an ideal

solution to balancing a career with motherhood. This arrangement was viewed as far preferable to part-time employment which had several drawbacks, as discussed. Some mothers who had retained former positions but on fewer hours (on part-time, rather than job-share arrangements) reported situations of being expected to fulfil the same tasks as when they were full-time. Whatever the negative aspects of part-time arrangements, research into mothers' psychological well-being suggests that those who work part-time or in job-share arrangements are more likely to remain mentally healthy than those who opt for either full-time work or full-time motherhood (Frangoulis, 1998).

On the issue of job-sharing, 1990s mother Cathy described how, when she became pregnant, she had hoped to retain her post as a lecturer in a further education college, but recalled her employer's surprise and reluctance when she had asked about job-sharing. Undaunted, Cathy had approached her union representative:

He was a single-parent father and was absolutely brilliant because he argued the case for me to do a job-share ... he was absolutely committed to the case and that made it very easy for me. He found somebody suitable and she came along and it was great!

In contrast with Cathy's positive experience, research suggests that job-share arrangements can be problematic, especially for women working at higher levels (see, for example, Spencer and Podmore, 1987). 1990s mother Liz described her somewhat negative experience of job-sharing, primarily caused by the complex logistical arrangements it involved. Liz and her partner, both university lecturers in the same discipline, had sought and achieved a job-share arrangement together. However, this was at a university far from home. Rather than move house they decided they would commute, each staying away for half the working week whilst the other partner looked after the baby. They found this to be a punishing schedule for all three. After this experience, when she had a second child Liz

desperately wanted to give up work altogether, but: 'I had to get back because we had real money problems ... and I *really* hated it...

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) suggest that companies are now recognising the need to develop more family-responsive policies, driven by the realisation that they may lose well-qualified and experienced female staff if they do not. Geraldine acknowledged some positive developments for women who wish to combine motherhood with employment. She cited, for example, how initiatives like Investors in People are bringing about improvements in workplace culture, enabling opportunities for negotiating career breaks and for arranging part-time and job-share arrangements. She concluded: 'People need to ask for what they want and not wait until they're stressed out before they decide they can't cope'. The question of workplace culture featured significantly in the discussions, with some mothers highlighting ways that their employers had been flexible and helpful, while others, mainly working in male dominated professions, presented less positive stories. These are considered next.

(iii) *Perceptions of anti-family culture in the workplace*

Although the staff were primarily women, it was run by men, all the top staff were men and it was their rules.

(Jane, 1990s mother)

The experiences of 1990s mothers Jane and Debbie are described next, highlighting some issues for women working in male-dominated occupations. When she became pregnant in 1990 Jane was an assistant manager in a bank. She enquired about the possibility of working reduced hours following her maternity leave, but was told that she would only be kept on as a part-time member of staff if she was prepared to take a job with much lower

status: 'If I wanted to go back as an assistant manager I had to go back full-time, which I just wouldn't consider: I just threw the lot in!'. Jane decided to give up work completely until her children were at school, by which time she had retrained as a teacher.

1990s mother, Debbie, worked in the police service:

I went back to my work after my daughter was born. I had to fight for people to realise that I was a mother too ... I was working on a specialist department and I had to fight to drop a day to four days a week ... A large proportion of this is to do with the organisation I work for being very male-dominated. But I felt that as a woman I had no status at all ... The importance for me to have just one extra day at home with my daughter was not recognised. It was a battle, and it is a battle which eventually I won; but it took its toll on me personally. It was a one-woman battle against the service...

Debbie went on to describe how after becoming a mother she noticed a change in the attitude of other members of staff. Senior colleagues especially appeared to go out of their way to make her life difficult, for example by changing her shift pattern with little prior notice, making childcare arrangements problematic. The literature presents some interesting observations concerning women working in traditionally male-dominated professions. Wilkinson (1994), for example, with reference to the Fire Service, notes that women often find the culture of a predominantly male work environment unsympathetic to their needs, and Watts (2007a) finds similarly with respect to the construction industry. Hakim (1996) observes more generally how professions traditionally thought of as 'male' can present less than helpful cultures and practices for women employees.

Further perspectives on the culture of work environments in the 1990s were offered by Cathy and Rosie, who remarked on the increasing incidence of a 'long-hours' culture in the workplace, even in their predominantly female work environments. Workplaces are

‘asking everyone to give one hundred and fifty per cent’ ... ‘It’s so stressful now ... there’s real pressure ... it’s absolutely exhausting!’ said Rosie. Watts (2007a: 1) concurs with this finding, observing that workplace culture is increasingly dominated by the values of ‘presenteeism and infinite availability’.

Notwithstanding this situation, the majority of the 1990s working mothers did not feel able to opt out of their careers, even for a short while, one reason being a strongly-held belief that they might never be able to get back in. As indicated above, others cited financial pressures for their unwilling early return to work. Still others emphasised the critical factors of self-fulfilment and identity as having influenced their decisions. These aspects are considered in some detail in Chapter 7, *Positioning Motherhood*. First, some insights offered by the working mothers on childcare are considered.

7. Childcare: options and issues

*I’m establishing what will come into place
later in my child’s life.*

(Bonnie 1990s mother)

The research participants recounted in some detail their experiences of different childcare options, drawing out what they perceived had been the advantages and disadvantages of each. One important consideration which emerged was finding alternative care that would suit the individual temperaments of their children. Further to this, the mothers shared their personal anxieties about the experience of having others care for their infant children, including feelings of guilt. With respect to the proportion and pattern of childcare, several defended their choices, but a few mothers expressed regret about the decisions they had made.

Generally speaking, the mothers involved in the research reflected statistical trends for their socio-economic groups (SOC, 2000) with respect to childcare, with only a minority of working mothers having had the option of drawing on the services of wider family (ESDS, 1995; Thomson *et al.*, 2008). For many, geographic distance from their birth family had been the main obstacle. However, 1990s mother Maxine, having initially considered a nursery when she needed to return to work for a few months to meet contractual obligations, felt relief when her parents and grandparents, living locally, agreed to share the baby's care between them for a limited period of time. She had felt unhappy about the idea of group care in a nursery for her baby son, yet described how this family care arrangement gave her complete peace of mind when at work. Also, non-professional care meant that: 'I could keep the maternity money, which was a great help'. Unlike Maxine, 1970s mother Janet recalled her firm wish to return to her full-time job after taking the few weeks of maternity leave available at that time. Janet's mother agreed to care for her baby and, like Maxine, Janet found it 'a bonus' that her mother did not expect to be paid.

It was partly for economic reasons that 1990s working mother Debbie and her partner, after using full-time nursery care for their daughter, decided that a better arrangement would be for one of them to stay at home to care for her. One reason was that the cost of care was taking up too much of their combined income. Additionally, with both working full-time, Debbie explained, life for all three of them had become increasingly stressful. Since Debbie earned a higher salary than her partner and felt strongly that full-time motherhood was not for her, they decided that her partner would give up his job and live on income support to care for their daughter:

Our income is probably only £200 a month less than when he was working because such a large part of it was going on childcare ... It's a bit tighter for us now, but for me, the advantages far outweigh [the disadvantages] because I can go to work with peace of mind knowing that she's at home and she's not rushed about to get

her here or there, and he's not rushing home from work to pick her up from somewhere else ...

Some of the 1970s mothers reported that they had, from time to time, used unqualified carers for their children: however, the situation was very different in the 1990s when childminders were required to be trained, registered and monitored (Bax *et al.*, 1990; Melhuish and Moss, 1991). This was recognised by the participants as having significant implications for the factors of cost, availability and reliability.

When seeking childcare for her baby daughter, Jenny did not initially consider using a childminder but sought a place in a nursery. Her vivid account of what happened is reported in full:

I took her to a nursery recommended by a friend, paid the fees and got her all signed up. I went along for the settling in period, but I took her out after half an hour, crying my eyes out. There was no way I was leaving my baby there, absolutely not! I found somewhere else and the same thing happened and it just made me realise that nursery wasn't the right place for my baby. So I decided to look into having a childminder, which, for some reason, I'd not considered before; she was only seven months and I thought she needed one-to-one care. I mean really... I wanted to stay off with her for longer, but you can only get four months unpaid (leave) which was really, really hard because financially, it crippled us really ... I desperately wanted to stay off longer unpaid - but I just couldn't and that was, difficult. Eventually I found the most amazing woman, and it was such a stroke of luck, and she's fantastic I'm so happy and she (the baby) has the time of her life. It does her good and it does me good, and I'm not trying to justify myself... she's leaping out of my arms to get to her and I'm really glad ... I have no jealousy.

Jenny went on to describe how she had been 'in a dreadful state and absolutely traumatised' by her need to find suitable care for her baby. 1970s mother Hilary reported similar feelings of trauma when she needed to leave her son in a nursery so she could

return to full-time work full-time: 'Both of us cried every morning ... the separation every day was hugely painful'. When she remarried and had more children, Hilary resolved to do things differently and did not work in their infant years. Kitzinger (2004: 76) recognises how disturbing it can be for a young infant to be separated from its mother. However, she reassures mothers that only *they* can judge when a child is ready for such arrangements, Such reassurance would have been meaningless to Jenny and Hilary, whose financial pressure was such that they had both reluctantly returned to the workplace earlier than they had wished.

In contrast to the financial pressure to use alternative care for their babies so they could work as described by Jenny and Hilary, 1990s mother Anna was materially able to afford to exercise her choice and she became a full-time mother. However, her eldest son had been born with disabilities, only recognised around the time when her second son was born. Anna therefore used a childminder to care part-time for her baby, to leave space and energy to meet with the special requirements of her older child.

1990s mother Rosie, on the other hand, was eager to return to work after maternity leave and opted for a childminder to care for her baby. Rosie worked from home on freelance contracts: 'On erratic hours; there didn't seem to be any kind of childcare that would cover what I needed'. Whilst to some extent the childminding option gave Rosie the flexibility she needed, the quality of care turned out to be unsatisfactory. 'I didn't really like the set-up because the woman had about *four other children* and my precious little baby of four months was just *one* of those children! I kind of popped in occasionally and found him in dirty cots and I didn't want him to have a dummy and there was a dummy in his mouth!' Rosie recalled how guilty she had felt, working in the pleasant surroundings of her home,

whilst her baby was being cared for 'around the corner in this horrible, sort of, grubby place'. Rosie eventually opted for live-in care in the form of an au pair.

Rosie reported that over the years her experience of au pairs has been positive. Not the least reason had been that this option gave her a measure of control over her children's environment: 'Over what's in the fridge and where they are going and things like that'. Rosie and her partner also benefited from having live-in care when any of their three children were ill and they both had to meet important work commitments. Rosie recalled their reaction on such occasions as: 'Thank God we've got the au pair!' Rosie relied on her 'gut reaction' in the process of choosing the various girls who worked for her family over the years. However, she recalled that, at the time, her friends thought her 'very brave' to put her trust in a young student-aged person to care for her young children.

In their comparisons of different forms of childcare, the 1990s mothers as a whole prioritised the features of 'safety' and 'reliability'. A few participants, whilst recognising the emotional benefits of one-to-one care for their babies as highlighted in the literature (see, for example, Biddulph, 2006) nonetheless had opted for group-care settings. In the discussions it emerged that they viewed this option as 'safer' than trusting care to a single person operating alone. In this regard, when trying to organise childcare, Debbie recalled the widespread publicity about child mistreatment by individual carers. She referred to a high-profile case of an English au pair on trial in America accused of murdering the child in her charge:

I remember finding it so difficult ... Do we send her to a nursery? Does she go to a childminder? I didn't have any family to support me ... and I just remember thinking: 'God, this is the most awful decision I've got to make' ... And people were saying: 'Did you see that programme?' ... I just thought it was guilt-mongering.

As explained above, Debbie opted for a nursery, but eventually the baby's father took over the childcare.

It is noteworthy that only two of the twenty seven participants involved in this research, Jill and Fiona, had accessed a work-based crèche. Statistically this is in line with national trends, yet a work-based crèche is recorded as the second most preferred option of mothers, after family (ESDS, 1995). Motherhood for Jill in the 1970s coincided with a national teacher shortage and she was 'head-hunted' into a post with the promise of a free place for her child at an on-site nursery unit, an offer she took up. This example of state support serves to illustrate how the lives of women and children may be manipulated by policy requirement, as discussed in Chapter 3, with reference to Storkey (1985).

Whereas Jill's experience of a work-based crèche was positive, this was not the case for Fiona. Fiona described leaving her desk each lunch-time to go to the crèche to feed her baby. She recalled the scramble of queuing with other mothers to heat her baby's food and the pressure and rush involved. Fiona's overall feeling was that 'There was never enough time to be with my baby'. Reflecting on perceptions of an increasingly time-poor environment for parenting, one recent study found that almost a quarter of working mothers thought they did not spend enough time with their babies, citing work pressures as the cause (Stewart and Vaitilingan, 2004).

Several mothers in the study commented on how the specific character and needs of an individual child, perhaps related to their position in the family, could affect their response to non-parental care arrangements. Some of the 1990s mothers recalled, for example, how a change of work routine, making them unexpectedly unavailable, could provoke very different responses in their different children. For example, Jane reported the difficulties

she encountered when her job had required longer working hours requiring that her seven-year-old daughter went to a childminder after school. Although this arrangement had been no problem for her son, it caused considerable upset for her daughter: 'I felt as if I'd got *all* that guilt that perhaps you have when your baby was four or five months old!' Again, with regard to the different needs of different children, Cathy recalled using a childminder for her first child, who was very content with the arrangement, but found that her second daughter responded very differently: 'The childminder was *great*, so you know, the second one comes and you think "This is fine, been there, done it, got the T-shirt", but she *hated it*, she *absolutely hated* it and I found myself going to collect her as soon as possible... she'd always be in tears, and I'd feel *awful*!'

1990s mother Yasmin explained to the group how, due to shyness and lack of confidence, both her children had hated being away from herself and the familiar surroundings of home. They would be 'clinging', 'crying' and 'screaming' if left with others. Even now that they are older Yasmin feels she has to force her children into social situations, often with negative consequences. For example, she described how her five-year-old daughter had recently joined 'Rainbows', a group for girls of primary school age. Yasmin had gone along to see the little girl make her 'promise': 'She opened her mouth but the words just wouldn't come out, she was so shy... I know what it's like and I don't want *them* to be like *me*, because it's held me back, and there's *nothing* I can do about it!'

Bonnie, a 1990s mother concluded from the discussion that: 'The problem with care settings [is that] they can't love your child as you love it'. Some mothers in the research reported positive experiences of childcare. Others, however, revealed what they perceived to be the negative elements of some settings for their young children.

8. Socialisation and quality of life

According to Maybin and Woodhead (2003: 17) socialisation is 'the processes through which a child becomes an active and competent participant in one or more communities', with social expectations a central factor in this process. Day to day, parents and others transmit particular values and engage in particular practices to socialise their children, a process recorded in the literature as a critical component of early care (Etzioni, 1997).

Whilst mothers from both generations involved in the research highlighted the importance of children's socialisation, there was some variation in what they had to say about how this might be achieved.

There were noteworthy generational variations, for example, in levels of concern about whether the children of present times were being appropriately socialised. In a modern context of busy mothers combining motherhood with employment, some of the 1970s mothers thought that this placed limits on parental input, to negative effect. Statistically, by 2000 two-thirds of mothers with dependent children had jobs (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003: 1). 1970s mother, Judy, expressed her concern about this: '[The children] finish school very early; 3 o'clock isn't it? These days, people are expected to work very late and what are they (the children) *doing* in that period of time?'

In a context of long working hours, 1970s mother Jackie was more concerned about parents being absent when their children were at the adolescent stage:

The time you need to be around is at the adolescent stage ... in my experience, if you've got a teenager and they want to talk about something, it's then and there and you ignore it at your peril! They say 'It's OK as long as I spend half an hour in the evening of "quality time" ... I mean, I think it's the other way round and children should see you when you're grumpy and foul and we should all learn to get through each other's moods and then not see you as this wonderful, calm person, who just comes in ...

There are different views about the quantity and style of parenting input required for children's adequate socialisation. Earlier, Myrdal and Klein (1968) had referred to problematic situations arising between women who take different approaches. However, it became clear from the discussions in one 1970s focus groups on this issue that they perceived an over-confidence in the younger generation of mothers in the 'catch-all' benefits of 'quality time' (Williams, 2005). This view emerged also in what some 1990s participants had to say on the matter. Rosie, for example, described her feelings of guilt concerning whether being a working parent had meant that too little time was available for her three children. She explained how her eldest son was awkward and argumentative. One day, she shared her concern about him with a friend: 'He's driving me bonkers'. In response, the other woman replied: 'But he's *such* a lovely boy, always really polite, and I hope my children will end up like him'. Rosie recalled her significant surprise at this remark and that it had made her feel quite tearful: 'He's a little *person*, he's a *person* when he's outside ... and he's *something*... It actually had quite a profound effect on the way I think of him ... I thought, "I actually must grow up about this"'.

Geraldine, who worked full-time when she had three infant children, as discussed, reported that she had recently begun to recognise the importance of making adequate space for building and sustaining relationships with them. She recalled how the pressure of trying to manage both employment and care responsibilities had left her feeling stressed and 'time-poor'. Eventually, she had changed her work arrangements so she could be primarily at home with her family. 'The other advantage (of giving up long hours) is that we eat with the children, we talk together, we face each other ... If children don't learn to play games and to be in family relationships, they never will.' Through personal experience, Geraldine had developed clear views concerning the effects on children who did not get enough of

their parents' time: 'I have the sense that children are often waiting for something ... If not provided for, they may look to be mothered by their partners', she thought. In contrast, 1990s mother Anna felt there was too much emphasis on 'nurture' with respect to children's socialisation: 'I think there's more to *nature* than we'd like to imagine. These days we're encouraged to *do* the right things and make children *perfect*: in the end, there's a lot that's just *in* them!'

The issue of time pressures on the mothers limiting opportunities for what they perceived as adequate engagement with their children emerged on several occasions in the focus groups. The 1970s home-based mothers recollected that time for them had not been much of an issue; they contrasted this circumstance with the situation today: '[Now] you've got the money, but not the time', said Viv. 'You cannot buy time' added Betty. Research by (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003: 20) found that even though children enjoy the material benefits that can accrue from their mothers working: 'Mummy, what have you brought me today?' important family time could be significantly compromised by paid work.

1970s mother Janet, who had worked full-time, did not recall feeling concerned about her child's socialisation. However, she shared with the group recollections of her anxiety concerning other aspects of her child's development. In her neighbourhood, she was the only working mother:

I was the only one who went back to work and I really felt the outsider. The lady next door who had been a nursery nurse was bringing her children up 'by the book'. They were reading at three and telling the time and doing their shoe laces up ... I felt pretty awful ... I'd got those ties to the child, the home and the family and the ties to work, which, you know, I didn't want to give up.'

1970s participant Jackie, on the other hand, took the opposite route and gave up work to be a full-time mother. She said that for her children's sake she was pleased that she had done

so. However, in retrospect, she felt she might perhaps have been a little 'over-engaged' in the role:

My children were totally attached to me. I think the day my daughter went to nursery was the first time she'd ever been out of [my] sight since she was born. Now I think, in retrospect, that's going over the top ... looking back, I mean they're growing up into incredibly confident adults, I must say, which is good, but I think I might have done things slightly differently ...

Hilary, as described above, was forced back into the workplace following divorce.

However, prior to this she recalled having been highly committed to providing exclusive care for her son, which had its negative elements:

I think the difficulty for me was around letting anybody else have an input into my child ... it was self-induced as far as I was concerned because, you know, there was something very competitive about me and how I brought up my child in competition with my mother, but better. So you felt if your child was cared for by somebody else, apart from the fact that he might cry or something, that it wouldn't be the right input, it wouldn't be the same values ...

Alongside the pressures on family time for working mothers there was a lack of time for them to be involved in other, unpaid, activities. 1990s mother Rosie, for example, explained that with responsibility for three children and working four days each week, she had little energy left for involvement with external activities like helping out at her children's schools. In any case, she remarked, with her third child she had been reluctant to do so: 'I just haven't the *energy* to do it with my daughter: I've kind of *been* there, done *that*, and I don't want to go back to it and I know I'm not one of the *good* mums, you know...but actually, I don't *care*!' 1990s mother Cathy, on the other hand, explained to the group how she had tried to fulfil all expectations for parental involvement in school life, at cost to herself: 'I'll do it, and that, and that, and that ... lots of times feeling exhausted'.

9. Conclusion

The above analysis has drawn on data presenting glimpses into the experience of motherhood in two very different generational contexts, broadly reflecting the social trends of their eras. In the early part of the discussion, the 1970s mothers conveyed memories of a post-war period distinctive for its social stability but also for its economic privations. A discourse of traditional gender role construction, with women constrained in the home, was also powerfully revealed. The diminishing status of motherhood was next discussed, drawing in rich data from participants of both generations. Some contributions were noted as inclined to collude with motherhood as low status and not a 'proper' role to be respected. Some 1990s mothers and a minority of those of the 1970s felt that motherhood should be fitted into women's lives, alongside other roles, like paid work. However, others, again representative of both generations, were clear that motherhood *was* an important role, albeit one affording diminishing levels of respect.

For the later generation, the issue of financial pressure to earn emerged strongly, with rising living costs placing pressure on them to return to the workplace sooner than they would have wished. Powerful constructions of what material requirements were necessary for families were identified as part of the growing consumerism in modern society, problematic for mothers. However, there were shared generational views on the importance of women retaining a measure of financial independence in the context of the increasing incidence of partnership breakdown.

A sharp contrast in conditions for working mothers of the different generations emerged, highlighting poor maternity leave arrangements and minimal employment rights in the 1970s. Whilst the 1990s mothers viewed employment conditions for mothers as gradually improving, their requirement for even more flexible and family-friendly arrangements

remained high on their agendas, not least for those working in male-dominated professions. One significant concern, highlighted by the 1990s women, was the pressure on them to decide, well before their babies had been born, when and under what arrangement they would return to work.

A discussion of childcare for working mothers elicited opinions and reflections on a range of options, drawing out what they perceived had been the positive and negative features of each. Related discussion concerning children's socialisation and quality of family life focused primarily on the 1990s environment, though participants representing both generations of mothers had personal experiences and wider views to contribute in this regard.

Elements of the data presented in this chapter have been discussed under an umbrella theme of social trends with women's constructions of motherhood revealed for the majority of participants as reflecting their generational norms and values. For the majority of the 1970s mothers who participated in the research, motherhood was prioritised in their lives. On the other hand, for the majority of the 1990s participants, motherhood was combined with paid work. The study demonstrates how by the later years of the 20th century, the concept of the working parent had significant reach into families and the ideology of women's roles (Carling, 2002). Overall, the ways in which both ideological and economic drivers served in separate and interconnected ways to construct motherhood are strongly indicated.

In the 1970s a normative prescription for full-time motherhood, with a consequent denial of personal and professional needs, was keenly regretted by some participants. However, a good many indicated that they valued the opportunity they had had to take time out for

motherhood. For the 1990s women, however, motherhood was constructed in their lives in rather different ways. Financial pressures, changes in policy direction, and a discourse of women's right to self-development and personal fulfilment served to imbue paid work with a status unknown to earlier generations. As with the 1970s generation, the majority of mothers in the 1990s felt themselves constrained to accept a normative construction of motherhood as prescribed in their era. Keeping up with the requirements of an economically demanding and increasingly consumerist society by fulfilling the dual roles of paid work and motherhood was achieved by some at significant personal cost, as articulated in their stories. Yet for all that, involvement in the external world of paid work was valued by some mothers as much for the self-respect and independence it afforded as for the material benefits it brought. Pragmatic decisions to convert to part-time jobs, whilst undermining work satisfaction, career advancement and financial rewards, had been made by the majority (Hakim, 1996).

In summary, as indicated, there was strong evidence in the data collected from both generations that motherhood role construction has been significantly driven by two separate but interconnected factors, one economic and the other ideological. Whilst the majority of participants in this research responded to the requirements of their separate eras, for some women this compliance had significantly undermined their sense of personal agency to formulate motherhood into their lives as they would have wished. Yet only a minority of participants had constructed motherhood into their lives in ways oppositional to dominant norms. Those who had gained some satisfaction that they had done this, at least in the short term. Importantly, the reflections of both generations convey an awareness of approaching change in the ideology of motherhood within each context. In this, there was hope in the women that change might afford opportunities for women of the future to realise their choices and meet their needs more fully, both as mothers and as

persons. Chapter Seven, *Positioning Motherhood*, takes this critical tension as its starting point.

Chapter 7

Positioning Motherhood

1. Introduction

*So the women are tossed back and forth, trying
to decide between these contradictory choices
(Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995: 30).*

With close reference to the data, the discussion which follows considers some of the ways in which the impact of motherhood affected the participants' sense of self. It will be seen how the women both reproduced and resisted contemporaneous images of motherhood with respect to its positioning in their lives (Lazarre, 1987).

Erikson's concept of identity, explored earlier, informs the discussion (Coles, 2000). This perspective, drawn from both psychological and psychoanalytic work, conceptualises identity as an individual's sense of being a discrete, cohesive and stable entity. With respect to role, on the other hand, Argyle (1968) presents a definition of the individual as playing out a pattern of expected behaviour. This idea connects with Erikson's theory of social identity as being 'located in the core of the individual, yet also in the core of [her] common culture' (Erikson, cited in Bendle, 2002: 11). Interpretations of motherhood are revealed in what follows to a significant extent as socially constructed by the norms and values of the separate eras (Tesch, 1990). For motherhood remains vulnerable to time-specific discourses, communicating to a woman how she should be thinking and what she should be doing about her responsibilities both to herself and to her significant others (Wiersma, 1992; Sunderland, 2006). In this chapter, as in the thesis as a whole, a tension between human interdependence and liberal individualism is therefore kept in view.

The concept of liberal individualism was considered earlier through the lens of feminist discourse and with regard to the reflexivity of identity construction in late modernity (Firestone, 1979; Giddens, 1991; Bendle, 2002). However, in a late modern context the idea of 1990s women being more agentic in their constructions of motherhood than 1970s women is revealed as problematic.

Some of the issues discussed from a contextual perspective in Chapter 6 are revisited in this present chapter but with a more individualised focus. It is revealed that the 1970s generation were, in a sense, absorbed by motherhood. However, a growing requirement for women to manage motherhood alongside paid work is shown to present a problematic tension for later mothers between their nurturing and producing roles (Gilligan, 1982).

With close reference to the data the discussion reveals how some participants of both generations felt overtaken by motherhood and resentful of its demands, whereas others embraced it as a unique opportunity for personal development and fulfilment (Leonard, 1993). *Positioning Motherhood* draws together elements of the data that reveal what the mothers had to say about whether they felt they had, or had not, retained their sense of ‘personhood’ within contemporaneous constructions of motherhood. Overall, the discussion aims to capture what the essence of motherhood was for the research subjects through an examination of the ways it had been intellectually and emotionally interpreted.

2. The importance of retaining personhood in a context of parenthood

(i) *The issue of identity*

The discussion begins with two contrasting perspectives:

I was forgetting me all the time and I thought I had to forget me. I thought that was what being a mother was.

(Hilary, 1970s mother)

I want to maintain my own identity. I want to be me, as well as being a mother and a wife.

(Yasmin, 1990s mother)

Each of these mothers might be viewed as expressive of their separate eras, yet the data presented attitudes, needs and values of greater complexity than this might suggest. For the 1970s generation prevailing social values encouraged a model of full-time motherhood, yet some revealed themselves as dissatisfied by this and made alternative choices. 1970s mother Janet, for example, returned to full-time work when her baby was a few weeks old. The economic privations of Janet's life were discussed in Chapter 6. Here, the focus is on her personal needs:

If I'd stayed at home and looked after two children, I really would have lost my identity, because although I thought a lot about the (children) I didn't want to spend days pushing them in the pram, up and down to the park. Even when my mother became ill and I found a very good childminder I was happy to leave them with somebody else. That sounds awful really, but I don't know, I could not be myself as I wanted to be, surrounded by two children ... that may have said something about the environment I was in, where I didn't want to be in that little group of women that talked about babies and children all the time.

To a certain extent, Janet's decision about an early return to work was made out of her need to maintain her sense of identity in motherhood. This issue emerged as important for several participants. Diana, a 1990s mother, for example, was clear that motherhood 'can leave out the person you have been before and it's important to acknowledge this'.

Another personal issue highlighted by some participants was a fear that motherhood would cause them to waste their talents, which they indicated was likely to happen if they abandoned their professional roles for home-based existences. Reynolds *et al.* (2003) present examples of women who, due to their levels of education and professional expertise, felt 'wasted' at home caring for their children. Professional identity was also viewed as likely to be challenged in cases where family responsibilities had required the women to seek family-friendly work arrangements, often outside their professional areas of expertise. This was the experience of 1990s mother Jenny, who had worked in theatre and television prior to motherhood:

What I'm struggling with at the moment ...being a mum ... is that I'm losing my identity ... like my acting ... this is something I can't do now, it would be impossible. And that is what gave me a sense of identity. I don't feel motherhood necessarily does that. Perhaps that changes as the child grows; I don't know. At the moment there are times when I do ask, you know, 'Who am I?'

In contrast, Anthea, a 1970s mother, presented a very different view:

We were on what you call a continuum: job, engagement, marriage, then babies. I wasn't interested in holding on to my previous identity, it wasn't expected. I had achieved. I had my man, my home, my baby. I look at modern mums and I think, 'What are you doing?'

Another 1990s mother, Emma, found that retaining an identity external to motherhood had not been important for her in the early months of her baby's life, however, by the time her baby was six months old the situation was different: 'I felt ready to go back (to work) and refurbish that part of my personality... I'm different at work, a social thing too...and I enjoy being part of a team'. Sullivan (1993) found similarly that professional roles draw on qualities in women different from those required in motherhood. Emma's view was typical

of several participants who had found that retaining a sense of who they were depended a good deal on their social interaction with other adults in a context of paid work.

(ii) *The need for adult company*

A significant requirement revealed by participants of both generations as new mothers, and presenting an important cross-thematic perspective, was a need for adult company, especially in early motherhood. Some of the women recalled days when they did not see another adult, causing a not insubstantial number to experience profound loneliness for the first time in their lives. Jenny, a 1990s mother, for example: ‘Being with people is important ... you’ve had two days and you hardly speak to anyone...’. Judy, from the earlier generation, described similar experiences. She would take her baby out to the shops, and, as part of a socialisation strategy, would leave some shopping until the next day so she had a reason to go out: ‘Some days you thought you’d *only* been with the *baby* and you needed *adult* company!’

1990s mother Diana, however, presented a different perspective. Remembering the early months of motherhood when she did not see many people, she recalled not having minded, out of an overwhelming need to be close to her baby. However, Diana recognised some of the negative aspects of this situation: ‘I lost “me” quite a bit; I wished I could have been more relaxed early on ... more independent of him’. 1990s mother Claire likewise described herself as being totally overwhelmed by the responsibility of life alone at home with a new baby. She recalled that she had been anxious in anticipation of motherhood, having had a difficult pregnancy ending with the onset of pre-eclampsia. Her baby had then been born by emergency Caesarean section and required special care. Claire thought that perhaps these circumstances had undermined her overall confidence in being able to cope with her baby. She strongly indicated that she would not have met the challenge of

motherhood without considerable support from others. Several instances were cited by both generations revealing that communication with other mothers was important for building confidence in the role, a finding common to other studies (Lazarre, 1987).

1990s mother Bonnie likewise recalled how motherhood significantly increased her dependence on others for company and support. This, she recalled, was in strong contrast to her pre-motherhood life of independence when she had happily developed her career, away from family and familiar surroundings. However, once she became a mother, Bonnie found that she wanted others around, her own mother especially, for support and advice. As with Claire, Bonnie thought that this had been due in part to her difficult experiences of early motherhood, which she described as: 'a strange, roller-coaster time, trying to get control and find out what being a mum was all about'.

Hilary, a 1970s mother, married and had a child shortly after leaving college. Being unsure of her career direction at that stage meant she felt quite comfortable about being at home, focusing her energies on motherhood. In contrast to the experiences cited above, Hilary presented an image of contentment with the early days of motherhood, although she implied that adult company was also required as reinforcement and to make the experience really pleasurable. She recalled: 'I loved it. I just held court in my own home and everyone came and looked at my baby... it was a lovely time'.

The importance of social networks is discussed in some detail in Chapter 8. For now, the question of motherhood as personal affirmation, or otherwise, is considered. Attention is also given to some strategies deployed by the mothers to achieve balance and contentment in their lives.

(iii) *The place of motherhood in women's lives*

*I feel I'd have lost confidence if I hadn't
kept up the idea of being good at something
other than being a mum.*

(Diana, 1990s mother)

Some participants gave strong indication that they found motherhood a positive experience that presented opportunities for satisfaction and self-development. However, for others these elements were mixed with frustration and regret about losing the person they had been. The importance of maintaining a sense of self when they had become mothers featured strongly for the 1990s generation especially.

1990s mother Diana welcomed motherhood because 'it had taken me long enough to become a wife and mother' (she was over 40 years of age). At the same time, Diana emphasised the importance of setting in place her personal strategies for keeping in touch with the person she had been, for example by taking on professional consultancies. For these, Diana always used her maiden name, 'which helps to keep my identity'. She had also maintained some physical space in the home for herself by establishing a small office there. Holding on to and renting out her pre-marriage 'bachelor flat' further assured a measure of financial independence for Diana extra to the consultancies. Diana was clear that having the opportunity to do some work had helped to retain her personal confidence in being good at something other than being a mother.

Geraldine offered an interesting perspective on the personhood/motherhood tension.

Geraldine's reflections on life as a mother drew on twenty years' experience in two marriages and the management of four children. Over the years, Geraldine tried various patterns of balancing motherhood and other roles including part-time work, and later, when

she had her second family, she worked full-time. However, after a period of trying to meet the requirements of a demanding career, four children and a partner with health problems, Geraldine ultimately opted to be a full-time mother. She said that at last she had become philosophical about not being able to hold on to her previous self in a context of motherhood and felt comfortable about this:

I feel my intellectual capacities are diminishing, but you have a different way of living ... I felt I wanted to be at home with my children because I would be giving them a bad example as a mother if I didn't: I wanted them to see that motherhood was a valuable thing to have I want to speak up for motherhood because, yes, motherhood is valid.

Geraldine's perspective is endorsed by that of 1990s mother Claire:

Claire: It's such an important time of his life. You certainly have to change the pace of the way you think about things. Everything takes longer, it's their pace, and that's OK. I just keep reminding myself that it doesn't matter if I haven't done anything in the day except care for the baby ...

These two participants were clear that maintaining a focus on their children, even at personal loss to themselves, was the way they wished to position motherhood in their lives. In contrast, some participants felt that motherhood undermined opportunities for self-development and at too great a personal cost. Others, however, found that motherhood gave them an opportunity to develop into more rounded persons. Diana, for example, described how the role served to confirm and strengthen her identity: 'I have mellowed tremendously'. Emma, also from the 1990s generation, similarly described how motherhood caused her to become more 'other'-focused. This was in contrast to her former self, when Emma recalled that she had been inclined to prioritise her own concerns. She added that family and friends had noticed a change in her since she had become a mother and had begun to relate to her differently and more positively. For Bonnie, motherhood brought about an increase in confidence and self-belief:

Motherhood has made me into a more confident person; I would follow my own instinct now, not just listen to others. I would stand up for what is right because being a mum has made me realise what I believe in: made me realise who I am and given me confidence in a deep-down way.

The above reflections on the positive effects of motherhood resonate with research conducted by Leonard, (1993) and by Weaver and Ussher (1997). Each recorded their participants finding motherhood almost world-transforming in terms of personal growth. However, as indicated above, a tension between motherhood and personhood for the participants involved in the present research was revealed. Some mothers felt challenged and discomfited about the role: that it undermined and restricted their opportunities to affirm themselves as persons. Others, however, as described, experienced the transition to motherhood and the continuing experience of being a mother as enriching and fulfilling. For others still, the women's reflections evidenced a mixture of the two.

3. Mothering: influences and styles

*I wanted to do a very different style of
mothering from that which I had experienced
(Jackie, 1970s mother)*

The next part of the discussion considers what the women had to say about the influence of their own mothers on their personal formulation of motherhood and the ways they would position it in their lives. Analysis of the data indicates that the participants' mothers featured significantly for both generations. For example, some motherhood styles and role positioning were consciously, or, the women recognised, unconsciously adopted. On the other hand, a minority of participants described their total rejection of the models set by their own mothers. Additionally, some of the 1970s mothers had reflected on the 1990s generation (sometimes through examples of their own daughters). Taken as a whole, these

reflections offered some valuable three-generational insights into the realisation of motherhood and its place in the lives of women over the past half-century or so. A recent study by Brannen *et al.* (2004) likewise afforded comparative insights into the lives of mothers (and fathers) over time, in this case from a four-generational perspective. More recently, Thomson *et al.* (2008) has conducted similar work.

In this present thesis participant observation on the lives of their own mothers was recorded in Chapter 6 with the focus on social context. In this chapter, however, the focus is more keenly on the individual style and positioning of motherhood in the lives of the different generations of mothers.

Jackie, a 1970s mother, recalled being very much on the periphery of her mother's life as a child, having been brought up by nannies. She had resolved, therefore, that when she became her mother she would place her children at the very centre of her life. Although brought up in very different economic circumstances from Jackie, 1990s mother Yasmin also recalled a lack of maternal input in the early life of herself and her siblings saying: 'My mum wasn't a proper mum'.

She'd worked as an early morning cleaner, and later on in the evenings and all night as well... so we were left on our own. I was twelve and responsible for getting the other children up and the rest of things like that... I've never been close to my mum and my mum was never very affectionate or very loving and she never told us she loved us and she never showed it. On the one hand there's this understanding that she did the best she could, but on the other, there's a resentment that won't go away, that she wasn't a proper mother, she wasn't like other mothers...

Later, Yasmin's mother, following a life-threatening illness, regretted the low levels of time and emotional input she had provided. Yasmin recalled her mother's words:

'I wanted to work. I spent my whole life working ... What did you want me to do? Your father was less than useless and I had four children to bring up on my own... What was the point? I spent my whole life working and, you know, I could have died and now I realise that the most important things are you and your brother and your sisters... '

Yasmin, whilst acknowledging that her mother had probably done the best she could in the circumstances, shared with the group the feelings of resentment which persisted. For this reason, as with Jackie, when she had her own children Yasmin resolved to be a different kind of mother and spend as much time as possible with them. It was a struggle financially to do so, but she resolved that any work she did would be part-time, and, if possible, from home. 'And', she concluded, 'It's very important to tell my children that I love them.'

Hilary, from the generation of 1970s mothers, was also critical of her mother, but in this case because of the older woman's overbearing attitude concerning the 'proper' role for a woman. In the late 1960s Hilary's mother placed considerable pressure on her to give up the idea of a career after college and opt for the 'traditional choice' of early marriage and parenthood. Hilary recalled that she had not been ready for that kind of commitment and responsibility but, 'She managed to brainwash me ... Being a 'mother' was what I was there for... I was doing what was expected of me...' In subsequent years, Hilary recalled her personal ambivalence about how to position motherhood in her life. On the one hand she was committed to the nurture of her infant children; on the other she resisted the rigid role construction of home-bound motherhood, as advocated by her mother.

In contrast, Sue, also a 1970s mother, recalled no pressure from her mother to realise motherhood or any other role in any particular way. However, she was convinced that her mother had been an unconscious role model for her concerning what the role meant and how it should be realised. Sue recognised the influence of her older sister too. Referring to

both these women, she said ‘I unconsciously admired their characteristics ... they had a certain generosity about them towards children and that was the way *I* felt’. Chodorow (1978: 51) discusses the ways in which a woman’s experience of being mothered herself creates specific ‘relational needs and capacities within her’.

For some of the women, however, their feelings about the efficacy of the role models presented by their own mothers were somewhat unstable. For example, 1990s mother Emma described how, during her infancy, her mother had trained as a social worker. She recalled feeling resentful at the time because her mother had been ‘distracted’. Yet now, as an adult, Emma uses her mother as a role model for herself, viewing the older woman not just as a mother but also as an interesting person ‘with different sides to her’. For another 1990s mother, Liz, however, confusion set in when the model of motherhood as set by her own mother which she admired was challenged by her peers. Academic colleagues presented an alternative model of motherhood - as one to be managed in tandem with her professional role. These contrasting positions caused conflict for Liz when deciding what kind of motherhood she wished to construct:

She was at home all the time... and very warm and loving, so I always felt I was going to have to also be there, always and never fall down with that... and I was failing my children if I didn't manage to do all those things...

The question of women’s needs and desires not to ‘fail’ in their role as mothers is considered below, where the factors of self-evaluation and guilt are looked at. For now, the discussion concerning what the women had to say about their own mothers continues.

For several years, until they reached school age, Rosie’s mother had been at home caring for Rosie and her twin sister. Managing a career alongside motherhood had not been an option for her as there had been no childcare available and no family living nearby. Rosie

recalled that her mother had said that she did not really mind about this because, in those days, 'We didn't have expectations'. Rosie, however, took a more negative view of her mother's life:

I think her existence must have been dreadful, no dishwasher, no washing machine... I mean she was a very bright woman and when we were at school, was studying law to become a barrister. She had a very acute brain and I think she looks back and must have been very bored. I'm not a very maternal person actually, I love my own children but am not the kind to grab a baby and enthuse, and neither is she and I was always aware of the fact that she was staying at home, looking after us. It was an achievement to get to the park and back in a day... She said her life was much simpler and not as stressful and as difficult as the constant juggling today...

When her children were at the infant stage, Rosie's mother did not have expectations of a life beyond motherhood. She played down how 'tough' it had been for her, feeling that Rosie and her sister, as working mothers in the 1990s, have much 'tougher' lives, juggling work and motherhood, than she had experienced a generation earlier. Putting personal needs on hold when she became a mother herself was inconceivable to Rosie herself, however. Whilst admiring her mother's self-sacrifice, Rosie decided when she became a mother that she would follow her natural inclinations to meet individual needs alongside motherhood. Beck *et al.*, (1995: 3) recognise an increasing focus on individual commitment to personal growth in a context of late modernism which they described as a 'universal zeitgeist', an idea explored in earlier chapters. I now turn to the question of sustaining personal growth within motherhood.

4. Motherhood and other-hood: Balance and conflict

People assume that you just spin these different plates... you have your child, you go back to work, you do all these things. It's just the norm... it's just expected...

(i) *Discourses of motherhood*

As discussed, a woman may be inclined to perceive and construct motherhood in ways reflective of familiar norms and values gained at the micro level of their birth family. Sometimes, however, as evidenced in the previous section, there is a rejection of this parenting style in favour of a different approach. The data revealed that for some women, an earlier style of motherhood was rejected not because it was perceived as intrinsically wrong, but because it was perceived as belonging to a different era with different values and priorities. In recent times, a commitment to realising motherhood or any other role differently from previous generations is viewed as a mark of individuality and a life feature of increasing value (Rose, 1989). In a late modern context however, individual choice may be a chimera, for, as ever, roles are constructed from the socio-cultural currency of one's era which is hard to resist, though some have done so, as this research testifies. Parker's (1995) work reveals that mothers both resist and reproduce society's assumptions of motherhood.

The practices of motherhood have a long and complex history (Badinter, 1980; Spender, 1983). An examination of the different discourses influencing motherhood role construction through two centuries was addressed in some detail in Chapter 2 with reference to the literature (Rich, 1976; Chodorow, 1978; Urbanski, 1983; Tomaselli, 1995). Over time, different feminisms justifiably have encouraged women to cast off the oppression of their gender and seek fulfilment in ways beyond home and children. However, it was the ideas of Second Wave feminism that most radically challenged women's perceptions of motherhood, for motherhood brings women's social positioning into sharp relief, as discussed. Feminist analysis reveals women as not positioned at the centre of their own lives for patriarchal legacy had constructed their fundamental

dependency. As mothers, however, they were required to adapt to the circumstance of having others dependent on them. This changing orientation, it is claimed, requires of a mother a 'reorganising of one's entire personality' (Oakley, 1979: 12).

In one of the focus groups Liz, a 1990s mother and university academic, considered feminist analysis in relation to motherhood and its positioning in women's lives:

I think part of the problem was Second Wave feminism actually, because it said 'We don't want to be domestic slaves any more. We don't want to look after the children ... Why aren't men doing it? Why isn't the state doing it?' Basically, the whole message was 'This is terrible, women are trapped in the house!' There was nothing like the acknowledgement of the value of doing that, or how much they might enjoy... So the whole message was coming through and it meant that most of our generation are thinking: 'What would my life be like if I weren't doing this? I'd have more friends, I'd have more money and could go on holiday. What am I doing? I'm doing things on the whole that are considered, you know, if they were paid, they'd be low-paid: they're not even paid!'

Liz recognised the personal sacrifice required of her as a mother but did not concur with the view that this was entirely negative, a position she perceived as articulated in feminist discourse. Moving on in her analysis, Liz went on to challenge what she saw as a common misconception that only simple skills and low intelligence are required when caring for babies and young children 'You need tons of energy and brain-power to do these kinds of things'. Hakim (1999) emphasises the intellectual dowry which educated mothers can bring to their children, in agreement with argument presented by Woolstonecraft two centuries earlier (Tomaselli, 1995). But beyond this, Liz described the emotional pleasure she personally gained from motherhood. Her recollections in this regard included an occasion when she took her young daughter into town and visited a café overlooking the main street:

We'd sit at the table by the window and I had my cup of tea and she had her juice and we'd watch the buses go past ... and I'd say 'buses' and she'd say 'buses' and that would give me pleasure ... And I suppose the other thing is every time you pick them up and you know, they're crying 'cos they're tired or they've fallen over or whatever and you know that's the place they want to be, with you, hugging you ... that's a nice feeling ...

Liz wanted to take more time out from work so she might more fully engage with the pleasures to be had from motherhood, but financial constraints forced her back sooner than she would have wished. Also, when she became pregnant her academic career was at an embryonic stage, with her PhD only just completed; this put pressure on her to establish and retain a foothold on the academic ladder.

(ii) Full-time motherhood: Personal perspectives

*Amongst my friends now, I almost feel I have to give excuses
for being a full-time mum*
(Claire, 1990s mother)

The separate issues of paid work combined with motherhood and full-time motherhood were considered in some detail in Chapters 3 and 6 with recognition of the effects of generational norms on women's choices. Bearing in mind these contextual factors a more in-depth consideration of data which revealed how individuals positioned motherhood in their lives is provided next. The discussion focuses first on full-time motherhood.

For 1970s mother Judy, the decision to give up her job when she had her first baby was due, in part, to an anxiety about what she would do if her child became ill, as she had no family living nearby for substitute care. Also, thinking back to the experience of having a first child who was a 'poor sleeper', she wondered how any mother with such a child could manage to work after they had been 'up and down all night'. Alongside these

considerations, Judy reported that as she'd worked full-time for a number of years, she was ready for a break: 'I was at a new stage of my life and I was going to enjoy it. I thought "I won't have any problem getting a job when I want one", which was not the case later, when things changed!'

Sue, another 1970s mother, recalled the very poor maternity leave arrangements available in her day as partly responsible for her and her contemporaries giving up their careers when they became mothers. She observed that today's arrangements, whilst in many ways presenting difficult choices for mothers, were a significant improvement on her day. However, she noted that in the 1990s mothers were expected to return to work when their babies were between six months and a year old. At that stage, she observed, a baby is becoming more socially responsive and the pleasure of motherhood increases. Gone are the sleepless nights, constant feeding and anxiety. It was therefore a pity, Sue thought, that this was the most likely stage for mothers to hand over their babies into someone else's care. A further drawback in returning to work at this stage was highlighted by other participants who revealed an awareness of attachment theory and how this process can be disturbed if babies were separated from their mothers (or main carers) at this particular stage (Bowlby, 1953; Biddulph, 2006).

The mothers who chose not to work in their child's early infancy presented a range of observations on their time at home with their babies. Whilst some found this situation personally constraining, others had viewed it as a 'freeing' experience, away from the responsibilities of the workplace:

Jackie: I didn't have to be at certain places at certain times and do things. It was just me and the baby you know and if we wanted, we could pack up and go into town and look around ... I could do exactly what I wanted, when I wanted, all day long and I thought that was absolutely wonderful!

However another 1970s mother, Janet, was less positive about her short period of full-time motherhood. Having returned to full-time work when her first child was a few weeks old, when her second child was born Janet decided to do things differently. However, she found the realities of providing full-time care for two young children somewhat difficult: 'I had a terrible shock being at home with two children: I didn't like it! I'd always thought the grass was greener staying at home, but I was bored and it was not my cup of tea at all'. Janet soon returned to her job, finding substitute care for her baby and toddler. Whilst recognising the occasional boredom of full-time motherhood, Anthea, also a 1970s mother, was clear that even when at home with young children, women could still 'get a life' because 'there's so much to be had from this role'. Anthea saw little point in having babies and then 'whizzing off to pay someone else to look after them'. Anthea recalled a positive memory:

When I was about 36 I was having a bath one day and had a 'Eureka' experience. 'That's it, I don't have to go back to work 'til I'm about forty and I'll still have twenty years of a career and that's a lot ... no problem, there's still plenty of time'. With the shock of realising that, I nearly drowned! You can be out of a career and in that time you'll learn many things ... then you can start a new career. Yes, you may lose your nerve, but you'll get it back!

The data reveals how several of the 1970s mothers used their time away from the workplace to pursue different interests, take up further study, and/or retrain for new careers. Such possibilities are considered in more detail in the chapter which follows.

Maxine, a 1990s mother, took time out from work for motherhood, recognising that by making this decision she had challenged generational norms, but had no regrets:

I stayed at home for five years ... I'm just coming back now he's at school ... Even though it was very hard and there were times when I would have liked company, I

wouldn't have missed it for the world and I still miss it now really. I always feel proud to be a mum, you know. I can't wait to tell people about my son.

This discussion on full-time motherhood concludes with some words from 1990s mother Bonnie: 'I felt insulated in my environment, totally immersed in feeding and caring for the baby. I felt entitled to spend all this lovely time with my child; going back to work didn't feel real somehow'.

(iii) Combining work and motherhood: Personal perspectives

Reflecting the statistical norms of their occupational groups as discussed in Chapter 1 the majority of the 1990s generation had remained engaged in paid work alongside motherhood. Most returned to the workplace within twelve months of giving birth, again reflecting statistical norms (Melhuish, 2006). In the discussion that follows, certain tensions and difficulties experienced by these mothers are revealed alongside the satisfactions of having taken this route. The discussion begins, however, with some reflections from a 1970s mother, Joan, who considers the lives of a 1990s generation of mothers in comparison with her own. Joan had wanted to keep up her career, but had been unable to do so:

But you see, I'm not sure how different it was from the experience of young women today, because I think they have all these difficult choices: well, they are called choices ... The decisions are still there: women being pulled into opposite directions, you know, desperately wanting to be a good mum and to meet your children's needs, but, you know, wanting to work as well. You can't do it, you can't do it all ...

However, due to financial pressure, desire for self-fulfilment, peer pressure, fear of losing status, or anxiety about jeopardising a valued career, a substantial number of the later generation of mothers had returned to work, a small number of these full-time. 1990s mother Bonnie had been determined to return to full-time work. Her reasons were

predicated on a complex intermix of reasons. These included the satisfaction she got from her job; the fact that she had always been 'keen to achieve'; a strong personal need to hold on to the status of work and the self-esteem it gave her and lastly, the fact that her own mother had worked. As discussed earlier, in the end certain factors caused Bonnie to change her mind and commit to full-time motherhood, a choice she has not regretted. In general, however, the data reveals that those who strived hard to get where they were professionally were reluctant to jeopardise career achievements and reluctant also to cease making a contribution beyond motherhood. In this regard, one 1990s mother observed that even work colleagues who had undergone years of unpleasant and expensive fertility treatment were still unwilling to relinquish their careers when eventually they achieved motherhood.

1990s mother Debbie emphasised how her job was of central importance in her life, affirming the person she is:

It's a very important part of my life, being a mother, but my work is also very important to me as well. Although financially I do have to work ... even if I had the choice [not to work] I would work because my work gives me a lot of satisfaction. I need to work and I need that identity and status of working.

Other participants shared Debbie's views on the way that employment satisfied important personal needs, not achievable through motherhood. The mothers revealed how paid work contributed to their sense of personal worth, sometimes unavailable in either motherhood or in partner relationships. Fiona, for example, recalled how her job, though not of significant financial benefit (most of her salary went to pay for a second car and childcare) met a strong emotional need. Fiona explained that her husband was a 'male chauvinist' ... 'He told me I needed to take second place in the home, so I felt I lost my identity'. Fiona

finished her reflections with a broader point about women's improved positioning in society noting that: 'The men never came to terms with what we women did'.

Notwithstanding the pleasures and satisfactions which women as mothers accrued from working outside the home, evidence from the data indicates recognition, by some, of its negative features. The emotional stress and physical exhaustion linked to juggling their different roles, for example, was a challenging reality recorded by several participants. Notwithstanding the stress of their dual-role lives, some 1990s mothers were clear that they would prefer to live with these pressures than comply with the norms of motherhood as prescribed for the previous generation. Research by Chang (1997) found similarly, that more recent cohorts of mothers display a stronger attachment to the workforce than those of earlier generations. Anthea, a 1970s mother, however, was confirmed in her view that modern mothers 'are going to miss out through all the rushing and the juggling'. This was Geraldine's experience:

I was rushing around to earn money and to fit in with everything else ... I asked myself, 'Why am I sending [my youngest child] to others to care for? I could be doing this... Why have I had them?'

Geraldine recalled an occasion when her son requested that they travel on a bus, rather than by car:

On the way to the bus-stop, he stopped every few yards: 'Look how yellow these daffodils are'. I realised how much we had missed, racing along in the car. He was fascinated by so much and I'd been rushing past to earn money and fit in with everything else. What I have learned from my children is that I'd forgotten to look at life the way they did.

Though it would create financial difficulties for the family, Geraldine eventually decided to give up her high-powered job, as discussed above. At the end of what had been a very challenging period of her life, she developed a different perspective on motherhood and on the situation of mothers in the 1990s struggling to manage their dual-role lives. Once at home full-time, this belief grew so strong that, as time and energy had allowed, she took her commitment several steps forward by becoming involved in a range of voluntary work in the areas of children and families. This includes voluntary work with a mother and toddler group, involvement with a parent support network and establishing a network of older people, linking them with young families in her area as 'adopted grannies'.

As discussed, 1990s mother Jenny was unable to pursue her preferred career in acting until her baby was older, so she sought part-time work outside her field of expertise. Although she did not find the work very interesting it helped her to achieve some kind of balance in her life: 'At least it releases time for myself and I can have a proper lunch break!' Jenny was of the opinion that a child will pick up 'positive vibes' from a contented mother, whether she's working full or part-time, so a woman needs to feel positive about the arrangement she has set in place. Jenny needed to compromise by taking a less interesting part-time job with lower pay, but was content to have established an appropriate role balance between her needs both as a person and a mother. Several 1970s mothers in the research revealed that once back at work part-time employment for them and for several of their peers became established as their pattern of work well into later life.

Whilst women from both generations recognised the benefits of part-time work, a minority indicated that this option did not always represent the easy solution with respect to their overall quality of life. 1990s mother Rosie, for example, noted that those among her peers

who worked full-time often did better in this regard. Not least, she observed, they felt justified in relinquishing their domestic responsibilities by employing help in the home:

I have friends who have nannies who do the washing and the cooking and the house is tidy when they come home ... If you're at home, then you're there to do it. But if you're part-time, you're doing both! This means that if you're working three days a week, you come home and then you're doing the washing and cooking over the two days or whatever it might be ... And occasionally you think: 'I had a social life once', so you try to fit that in as well!

The research revealed how the different roles performed by the women became part of a continuous process of identity construction (Burns, 1979; Coles, 2000 and Schechtman, 2005 observed similarly). As late 20th century professionals and semi-professionals the mothers were expected to be agentic in this respect, and, within the practical constraints of their lives, to construct and manage their various life roles successfully. Some of 1990s mothers were professionally ambitious, having achieved relatively high occupational levels prior to motherhood. Equally, however, they wished to establish and maintain high standards as mothers. Some found keeping up professionally alongside meeting satisfactorily the considerable demands of motherhood very difficult to achieve. Rosie explains:

And you come home and you're really tired and one of the things I picked up on was the job of balancing rights and responsibilities ... [Rosie had prioritised this topic for discussion] because now I work in a university and I'm teaching students and I find myself in this very difficult position where I haven't kept up professionally with what's going on in my business ... so I feel completely inadequate in my professional role...

In illustration of her point Rosie described the challenge of keeping up to date with the literature in her discipline, yet when she tried to do this at home she would become distracted:

When am I going to have time to read it? And I can't retain the information because I'm thinking about my son doing his homework, and, you know, I find that is so incredibly difficult! I wanted children, I couldn't envisage not having them ... but it's about, what you say: 'Having it all', I want to be top of my profession, I want to be good and I can't! I don't know how to do both!

Some reflections from 1970s mother Marie afforded significant contrast to Rosie's account and those of others from the 1990s generation who revealed the stress of juggling work and motherhood. Marie took several years out of work to care for her children and described feeling refreshed on her return. She recalled work then as profoundly pleasurable: 'So peaceful, wonderful, no distractions, you can concentrate... work was really a doddle ... there's a sort of outcome; someone's not sabotaging your efforts all of the time!'

As indicated above, alongside a desire to perform well professionally, some of the women in the research expressed a need to 'perform well' in their motherhood role also. In some ways they seemed to professionalise the role, registering frustration when standards were not met. The data reveals how the 1990s participants especially entered into a process of judging their motherhood role performance more than was the case for the 1970s generation, although there were exceptions. The next section focuses on this issue of self-evaluation and the challenges that the mothers set for themselves when trying to meet perceived standards.

5. Self-evaluation

*I wanted to feel fulfilled being a wife and a mum,
but frightened that I wouldn't be good enough ...*

(Bonnie: 1990s mother)

(i) *Achieving and sustaining standards*

The literature presents evidence which suggests that through time motherhood has been connected with models of the 'ideal' (Badinter, 1980) so the fact that the participants focused on standards for themselves is perhaps unsurprising: 'I probably lacked confidence in every way to take on all these different roles and conform to certain expectations' (Viv, 1970s mother). For many of the subjects in the research, a sense of 'appropriate' standards for motherhood began with giving birth. As with mothering, labour is not an exact science, but this is a reality often overlooked and difficult to communicate to professional women familiar with setting and achieving standards. Ante-natal education programmes for expectant parents such as those offered by The National Childbirth Trust try to encourage more open-minded and less 'controlling' approaches to giving birth: 'Prepare yourself beforehand and, on the day, respond to what is happening in the best way you can. Remember, in the end, the object of the exercise is a live baby and a healthy mother' (1981, Lowe).

With respect to the issue of self-evaluation, under consideration here, some participants had found that a less than 'perfect' birth experience had left them with a sense of having 'not made the grade', and for a small number, this feeling persisted into early motherhood. For example, after reflecting on her early difficulties, 1970s mother Joan evaluated her motherhood 'performance' in the years that followed: 'I don't think I'm a natural... I mean, I don't think that I was ever a very good mother... and probably if you ask my children I was probably better than I think I was. The problem for me is that I don't *feel* like I was a good mum at all'. Beyond striving to meet personal standards for motherhood, several participants communicated a desire to measure 'successfully' against the norms and standards of their times.

The responsibility for the life and well-being of a vulnerable infant can cause considerable anxiety for new mothers and is a task, several participants thought, which is far more challenging even than starting a new job. On the matter of breastfeeding, for example, 1990s mother Jane shared her memories about the importance, to her, of getting it 'right':

It's supposed to be 'natural' if you're a woman ... I'm thinking, if you're in a new job, you've only got 'you' to think about and you've only got you to blame if it goes wrong, but when you've got a little baby: big responsibility. If you do something wrong, then it's them that you're punishing ... they're going to suffer and I think it's a guilt trip!

The data reveals how some participants engaged in considerable self-recrimination on the matter of breastfeeding, seeming to lose all rationality concerning why the process can be difficult both to establish and maintain. For example, 1990s mother Jenny recalled thinking: 'It's me, I'm not doing it right' adding that: 'I think breastfeeding is a huge area where you can feel inadequate'. The mothers' experiences of birth and breastfeeding and the early neonatal period are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

As new mothers, some participants felt that they lacked the knowledge to confidently 'go it alone' and needed 'systems' to work with. 1970s mother Anthea, for example, tried to sustain the four-hourly feeding regime established at the hospital when she returned home with her new baby. This regime, coupled with her own strict upbringing and professional training, had inclined her, she believed, 'not to have emotions about children ... my feelings didn't come into it for ages because I didn't know about the emotional aspects of care'. The model described by Anthea might be contrasted with later 'feed on demand' approaches and overall more *laissez-faire* styles of mothering in the years which followed. Such approaches advised parents to tune into the physical, emotional and psychological needs of their child rather than imposing programmed systems on them (see, for example, Spock, 1979).

In summary, several participants from both generations had been anxious to establish mothering competence early on from a fear that unless they did, all would be lost. Some observed that their anxiety to develop competence in themselves had the effect of excluding others, not least the baby's father:

Liz: Because it was the first one, you're much more concerned to get it right and I can think back that I pushed [the baby's father] away on a lot of occasions ... I wanted to be the one who could do it well and therefore, you know, he didn't get much of a chance to be the one that could do it well...

(ii) Motherhood in retrospect

As discussed, the mothers had a natural desire to supply what they thought their babies needed. However, the data suggests that some mothers communicated guilt and a sense of failure when they perceived they had not done this. For example Viv, who a working mother in the 1970s, described how she tried to deal her guilt about not caring for her baby herself. She recalled that she 'over-compensated' in the evenings, insisting on entertaining her young son for hours on end: 'My husband would say: "For goodness sake, he doesn't actually *want* you to play with him!"'. For 1990s mother Debbie, on the other hand, guilt was generated by her enthusiasm to return to work as soon as practicable and leave her baby in the care of others:

When I was off for six months after my baby was born, I was dying to get back and that makes me feel quite guilty actually. I feel a lot of guilt about wanting to be at work, but I also recognise that it's very important for me to work: I get a lot of value and satisfaction from doing it'.

Viv and Debbie constructed motherhood in their lives in ways which also met their own needs as persons. Whether their children were negatively affected by this did not seem to be the point in what they had to say. Their perception of motherhood, erroneous or not,

was as a role requiring levels of considerable personal sacrifice which they felt they had not met.

The majority of the 27 mothers involved in the research were willing to contribute their reflections on early motherhood experience, with some presenting in-depth insights concerning the extent to which they felt motherhood had been integrated ‘successfully’ or otherwise with their personal needs and aspirations. A small number, whose children are now adults, looked back with some regret on the sacrifices they made and the effects of these on themselves and their children. 1970s mother Betty, for example, recalled the rigours of bringing up four children largely single-handedly as her partner had worked persistently long hours throughout. Betty indicated that her health was undermined by the process of these long years of parenting:

I’ve had quite a lot of ill-health, even though I’ve had four children, I’ve had heart problems and it’s been touch and go sometimes ... And one phrase that springs to mind is: ‘Who mothers the mothers?’ And you stand back and you look and you sometimes see where the roles fit in and why things that are set early in life, produce things later in life...

Another 1970s mother, Janet, who had become pregnant with her first child early in her marriage, said that she wished she had known more about contraception! However, having had her children when very young, her two offspring had left home long ago, meaning that she and her partner are now secure financially and have the time and energy to enjoy themselves. Janet went on to explain that her children ‘have not done fantastically well academically, [but] they’re happy and well-settled and they come back and the house is full of people ...’ Notwithstanding this, Janet concluded with the remark: ‘With hindsight, I would have done things a lot differently, definitely as far as work commitments [are concerned]’. Janet had worked full-time throughout her children’s infancy.

In retrospect, in a similar way, 1990s mother Rosie blamed her personal commitment to her career for her eleven-year-old son not 'making the grade' at school: 'You look at your kids and you think "I didn't get that right". It's very difficult to think what to do ... my kids are very *gregarious* but there are a lot of things that I could have been at home for ... you know, I could have done better by being at home'. Rosie went on to explain that she'd recently resolved to change her work routine better to meet the needs of her growing family.

Modern mothers, with justification, have sought the right to realise themselves in roles outside motherhood. In this they have met the increasing expectations of late 20th century society to perform well both as mothers and earners. Reflecting on this pressure, 1970s mother Judy described an advertisement she had seen on an underground train publicising university courses for mature students. It showed a photograph of a woman with a speech bubble which read: 'I've got three children and a job and I'm doing a university course!' 'Who can top that?' asked Judy 'What are we expected to do? Crazy!' Similarly, in one of the 1990s focus groups Yasmin noted: 'There's another sort of message coming out as well 'You can "have it all" You *can* combine motherhood with working and with interests and with study too'. After a short pause, Yasmin said: 'Actually, 'I'm doing a Master's as well!' This might be seen as typifying her generation's 'can do' response to the many requirements society has of them as mothers, and as individuals expected to remain committed to their own development. As Mavis Cheek pithily expressed it: 'A woman today is beaten by several different sticks: she's supposed to be a lively partner, produce children, have a successful career and still pick up the socks!' (BBC *Woman's Hour*, 3.2.06).

In summary, the data provide an overall impression that whether the mothers had chosen full-time motherhood or had combined motherhood with employment they had sought to meet both their own and society's standards and expectations. If they perceived they had fallen short in this endeavour, they felt guilty. If their personal choices went against dominant norms, some received censure. 1990s mother Bonnie, for example, had chosen full-time motherhood: 'I'll take some time out, there's nothing wrong with that!' However, she recalled that:

Sometimes, I have to bite my tongue when I'm with my friends because I feel they patronise me when they say: 'I really admire you for staying at home, I couldn't do it!'

Bonnie interpreted this remark as implying: 'It wouldn't be good enough for me'. The words of another 1990s mother, Emma, who returned to work after maternity leave was evidence of the attitude Bonnie described when she remarked: 'I inevitably compare myself with my peers. I ask: "Why don't they want to return?"'

To conclude this discussion of participant reflections on an important question in this research: that of balancing parenthood and personhood, the words of 1970s mother Joan are quoted in their entirety. Joan's words connect with several the issues considered in this particular chapter. She reflects first on the question of guilt and the difficulty some women have in reconciling society's perceptions of motherhood with their personal needs and wishes, including notions of who they feel they really are, or wish to be:

I think most mothers are racked with guilt, or certainly most mothers who try to work and be a reasonably good mother... You spend most of your life feeling guilty and you know you're not doing either of the jobs very well... I was also thinking about the lack of childcare provision and the lack of choice, and I hope [the childcare situation] really has improved so it might make it slightly easier for the women who actually want some other identity, who don't feel that just being a mother is enough ... I mean personally, I've always really, really envied the women who loved being mums, you know and just thought it was the best job in the world,

because I sort of wished I could have been like that and then there wouldn't have been anything like, you know, the guilt and wanting to do both and feeling that you're not doing either well enough.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has given in-depth consideration to elements of the data that revealed the positioning of motherhood in the lives of the two generations of mothers. Alternative constructions of motherhood were drawn in through the participants' reflections on the role as perceived by other generations. Discussions of their own mothers' positioning and style revealed powerful emotions, especially in cases where these constructions had been consciously rejected (for example, Jackie, Yasmin and Rosie), or seen as unattainable (Liz). Feminist discourse was revisited, with a critique offered by one 1990s participant who highlighted what she perceived as its practical shortfalls for mothers trying to rationalise the role in their lives in ways satisfactory to themselves and their families.

There were personal reflections on full-time motherhood and combining motherhood with work. Some of women who had chosen full-time motherhood in their children's infancy described the experience as pleasurable and free from the constraints and pressures of trying to manage dual role lives. However, this was not the case for some others who felt constrained and frustrated that society had constructed full-time motherhood for them. Whatever experience they had and whatever positioning they had adopted, several participants revealed the important personal endorsement which paid work afforded to them as persons, in ways beyond motherhood.

A later section revealed instances of the mothers' engagement in self-evaluation regarding decisions they had made and routes they had taken. The achievement, or non-achievement, of 'standards' for motherhood as set by their socio-cultural contexts in each generational

case, then provoked serious consideration. The final part of the discussion revisited aspects of the data which revealed constructions of motherhood and the ways these constructions had or had not met the women's perceptions of the ideal.

The opportunities for the 1990s generation to maintain other lives alongside motherhood might be seen as expressing a stronger sense of personal agency than was the case for mothers in the 1970s. However, it was revealed that a not insignificant number of the 1990s generation had responded negatively to the normative pressures of their context. Yet the minority of participants who had gone against generational norms recorded their sense of unease in so doing. In summary, the 1970s working mothers felt, or were made to feel, guilty that by meeting their own needs they had not fully addressed those of their children. In a contrary way, the full-time mothers of the 1990s had a sense that they were failing to affirm women's hard-won place in society by not continuing with engagement in roles beyond motherhood.

Broadly speaking, both generational sets registered motherhood as having transformed their personal worlds and sense of self: a circumstance welcomed by many, but not all.

With respect to the issue of balancing personhood and parenthood in satisfactory ways, the data indicates that a substantial number from both generations believed their situation to have been less than ideal. The opportunity to exercise real choice within enabling contexts had thereby eluded several mothers of both generations.

A focus on the tension between personhood and parenthood presented in this chapter, *Positioning Motherhood*, is revisited in the next chapter, which looks in some detail at the women's experiences of early motherhood.

Chapter 8

Mothers, babies and others: Intervention and support

*Parents need to start with what their children in fact
are ... and not seek to fashion their children to suit
their own hopes and expectations.*

(Annand, 1977)

1. Introduction

The birth of a first child is a life-changing event (Weaver and Ussher, 1997). This chapter aims to capture the essence of early motherhood through an examination of its day-to-day lived experience. With close reference to the data, the effect of having a first baby on the lives, values and priorities of the participants is discussed. For example, some mothers described how motherhood relentlessly took over their lives, generating disturbance to their identities and a sense of loss of the people they had been. Feminist urgings to position motherhood as just one element of their lives and not its 'defining core' (Snitow, 1992: 41) appeared far distant for these women as they strived to meet their babies' needs. The women's experiences are powerfully revealed as endorsing a view that motherhood can never be a contractual operation of the self-interested kind (Held, 1993).

The importance of support in early motherhood is emphasised in several ways in the chapter, which comprises six main sections. The topics 'giving birth' and 'breastfeeding' form a dual focus for early consideration. This develops into a discussion of the mother/child dyad, emphasising its emotional interconnectivity and explored through the circumstances of 'crying babies' and 'contented babies'. Later, with reference to the literature, the fatherhood role is considered alongside data revealing its different styles and

realisations. Lastly, a section on 'social networks' considers the issues of companionship and self-development for women in the context of motherhood. Generational differences are highlighted as the discussion proceeds.

Motherhood is a largely unlearned role. At the same time, ever-increasing sources of information and advice are available (see, for example, www.mumsnet.com). However, several participants revealed that they had not been confident of their knowledge and skills in early motherhood. In a late modern context of separation from their wider family, opportunities to observe mothering practice were somewhat unavailable. Empathy, patience and ways of responding appropriately to a very young infant whose only means of communication is crying are unlikely to have been skills honed in the women's professional work settings. However, for the most part the mothers appear not to have sought lay advice from more experienced mothers at this time, preferring instead to rely on professional guidance and advice which often proved contradictory and unhelpful. Recent research by Thomson *et al.* (2008) finds similarly.

The data revealed that, for the 1970s generation, motherhood had been a more taken-for-granted experience, with these women recorded as just 'getting on with it'. Nonetheless, this present research reveals how some 1970s mothers had also felt inadequate to meet the demands which early motherhood presented. Being likewise geographically distant from wider family and isolated from the camaraderie of the workplace they too experienced profound loneliness.

From the 1970s onwards, control over fertility meant that women more reliably realised their preferences concerning whether and when they would start their families and in what relational context. Opportunities to exercise individual choice in personal life increased in

the final decades of the 20th century (Giddens, 1991; Heelas, 1996). This trend was reflected in affirmation of the rights of individuals to make choices for themselves, evident in the accounts of the later generation of mothers involved in the research.

By the early years of the new millennium it was revealed that only a fifth of female graduates had become mothers by age 30 (Brown, 2004). The 1990s generation, having become mothers later in life than the 1970s generation, had well-established careers, in many cases with high earning power and associated high levels of self-esteem. In several ways work defined who they were, indicating greater personal and professional loss when disengaged from their occupational settings than had been the case for the 1970s mothers.

It is reasonable to suppose that in their professional settings such women would proceed with work tasks on rational grounds, based on full knowledge of the variables. However, the data reveals that several participants had anticipated the unknown and uncertain variables of birth and early motherhood with high levels of insecurity. When labour would begin, how it would progress, how long it would last, and what its outcomes might be presented situations of uncertainty that they were unable reliably to predict, manage, or control. This uncertainty for many persisted into early motherhood.

2. Giving birth

What follows now are some insights into what the 1990s generation of participants had to say about the process of giving birth, including the role of professionals and the variability of their experience in relation to this. There is no data from the 1970s mothers concerning the birth process, however. It might be reasonable to suppose that memory played a part here given that for some the birth of their first child had been two or three decades earlier, causing a natural fading of its joys and dramas. However, as with the younger generation

of mothers the 1970s participants spoke graphically about the early days and weeks of the lives of their newborn. Perhaps therefore the issue was not one of memory, but rather that these were parents of children who were grown up; thus they were no longer socialised into locating motherhood within the embodiment of the birth experience. Also, one might speculate whether the participants from this generation had viewed such an intimate topic as inappropriate for public discussion. A further point for consideration in this regard is that the majority of the 1970s participants had their first labour experience at much younger ages than the 1990s mothers. This is likely to have meant that their labours were less attenuated and problematic; or, in those earlier, less litigious times, less prone to technological intervention (Kitzinger, 2004). Overall, perhaps the most reasonable explanation for the lack of interest displayed by the 1970s women in discussing their labours might have been their many years of parenting since the event. These years would have served to contextualise the birth process as just the *starting* point of an important life role which would present many more joys and dramas as the years progressed.

In the following discussion, mothers in one 1990s focus group explore together memories of giving birth. They assess the impact of professional input towards the facilitation of an unproblematic labour, or otherwise, and the effects of this on their levels of confidence overall. Significant in these experiences were the assumptions and expectations of the individual women, resting to an extent on questions of personal adequacy, choice and control:

Debbie: For everything I've done in my life, you know, like 'A' Levels, university, for everything, I have been trained. And then I got pregnant, which wasn't planned, it was an accident ... It was when they showed me around the labour suite at the hospital that I looked into this room with this bed in it and all this equipment that something came upon me and I thought 'Oh my God, what on earth is going to happen to me!' And I think the delivery of my daughter was the most shocking, traumatic thing, and it's the one thing that prevents me having

another child. It frightens me to death ... the thought of going through that again, and just everything which followed. I just felt, completely inadequate ...

Jenny, another member of the group, asked Debbie if she thought that the birth experience had been traumatic because she had not received the assistance she needed. Debbie said that her interpretation was that the problem had been one of fear: 'I think I was frightened to death. I'd never been in a hospital in my life. I was frightened to death and, suddenly, I was in a situation where there was this enormous *pain!*' Jenny suggested to Debbie that perhaps she had felt out of control. Debbie agreed:

No control ... I couldn't get her out because my pelvic floor wouldn't shift and I was told that riding horses makes your pelvic floor very ... They could have told me that nine months earlier! I couldn't get her out and it was just, I just felt inadequate because I don't feel that I delivered her 'right' cos I couldn't do it, and no one told me how to do it!

Jenny next asked about Debbie's pregnancy and whether she had liked being pregnant. Debbie replied 'I did, I loved being pregnant and it was a very good pregnancy'. There were indications that Debbie's problems had been both physical and psychological and it was surprising that Debbie appeared not to have prepared herself better for labour. This lack of preparation had arguably contributed to making her fearful of the process, a situation exacerbated by her sense of being 'out of control'. Such emotions can interfere with the effective progression of labour. As with some of the other 1990s mothers, Debbie placed the responsibility for her negative birth experience on the quality of professional advice and support she had received, concluding that her labour had been 'very badly managed by the hospital'.

Jenny's birth experience was in marked contrast to Debbie's. Again, the word 'control' featured several times in what she had to say. Jenny revealed that even when in quite

severe pain: 'I still felt in control of the situation, I still felt I had a say in how the baby was born and what was going on and that was really important to me'. Prior to going into hospital for the birth of her baby, Jenny explained that she too had felt fearful in anticipation of the unknown. However, her fears had been allayed by an 'excellent' midwife who was patient and supportive throughout the labour. Jenny interpreted the whole process as demonstrating successful 'teamwork' between herself and the midwife in attendance.

Several other birth experiences were described in graphic detail in this focus group discussion. Some were positive, like Jenny's, but others more negative. For example, Maxine likened her labour experience to being in a 'car-smash'; she remembered feeling 'traumatised' and had wanted someone just 'to take [my son] away'. Debbie could relate to this, recalling her feelings of numbness when the baby was placed in her arms: 'I just didn't feel anything for her'. Some of the mothers recalled their feelings during and immediately after the birth as markedly contrasting with their sense of optimistic anticipation in pregnancy. These women drew the conclusion that the cause of their negative experiences had been over-medicalisation of the birth experience combined with conflicting advice and lack of emotional support from the professionals, rather than anything they themselves had done or not done.

Another member of this group of 1990s mothers, Jane, pointed out that the quality of professional intervention and support for mothers is very much 'the luck of the draw'. She recalled her own good fortune in being attended by a reassuring and supportive midwife when she had her first baby. Additionally, with respect to a woman's anticipation of labour Jane felt it important to 'keep an open mind: anything can happen'. This idea is endorsed by ante-natal educator Lowe (1981).

The above discussion demonstrates the variable quality of professional help and advice available to mothers in labour. Whilst parents have overall prime responsibility for the well-being of their child for the tens of thousands of days which will follow the initial birth-day, a woman's experience of labour nonetheless is of enormous significance, both in its anticipation as in its realisation. The average family sizes of the two generations of mothers involved in this study (detailed in Chapter 5), indicate that the 1990s mothers produced fewer babies than the earlier generation. This factor alone can serve to enhance the importance of each single birth experience. Statistical evidence further indicates that professional women in the 1990s would have had their first pregnancies later than earlier generations, often in their 30s and 40s (Brown 2004). This circumstance can have physical implications for the labour process (Kitzinger, 2004). Also, for many of this generation the decision to become pregnant may have been made only after considerable reflection, and, in a few cases, following necessary and often protracted technical intervention.

3. The baby

(i) *Health and well-being*

She suddenly went downhill and lost weight

(Jenny, 1990s mother)

Out of the 27 mothers involved in this study a few described how their babies had manifested physical problems at or shortly after birth. Fortunately most of these conditions were of short duration. However, some participants reported that even minor physical and health problems exacerbated the natural anxiety they had felt in the early neonatal period. For example, 1990s mother, Jenny, described how, following a relatively unproblematic labour and a 'euphoric birth', her daughter developed severe jaundice requiring special care and feeding through a tube. These difficult first few days interfered with the

successful establishment of breastfeeding which she had really wanted to do. The concern about her baby and disappointment over the breastfeeding impacted negatively on the emotionally vulnerable early period of motherhood for Jenny: 'I just cried every day for about five days ... I was in a real state'.

Joan, a 1970s mother, shared a similarly upsetting experience with the members of her focus group concerning her baby's high palate, again affecting the early bonding period by creating difficulties with breastfeeding. Viv, another 1970s mother, described the impact on her of her son being born with a large swelling on his skull caused by the difficult labour. As with Jenny and Joan, this problem made the first few weeks of motherhood a difficult and emotional period for Viv:

It's difficult to pin-point exactly ... it wasn't so much frustration, it was more fear I think ... and powerlessness in that, when my son was born, he had a very difficult birth and had a huge swelling on his skull and I was very concerned about brain damage, and also that I didn't have a 'pretty' baby, it was not a baby you could wheel out, and be proud of...

Viv's reactions went beyond the issue of her baby's health into social concerns. She went on to explain that her baby's condition had turned out not to be serious. However, this was not the case with 1990s mother Anna, whose very premature baby was born at twenty five weeks' gestation. However, Anna assured the group that her baby's prematurity had not spoiled her sense of euphoria at giving birth. Anna explains...

I'd had a pretty awful pregnancy and I'd miscarried four times before, so he was a great result for me. I had a live baby! For other mothers it looks, I mean, it was horrible to have a baby like that, but for me ... I was clearly excited about it... We didn't know he was disabled until we realised he was not developing as quickly as some other children, but, basically, no one tells you really, until you realise for yourself...

Anna's son has cerebral palsy.

The above extracts provide insights into how a baby's physical condition can significantly affect a woman's transition to early motherhood. Whilst most of the health issues described above turned out to be short-lived and manageable, at the time they had presented apparently insurmountable challenges to the mothers in the establishment and management of their new role.

(ii) *Breastfeeding*

It's me, I'm not doing it right!

(Jenny, 1990s mother)

A second element of early motherhood where the mothers needed support and advice was with the process of breastfeeding. Whilst 1990s mother Jenny's experience of labour overall was positive, breastfeeding proved to be problematic. After delivery Jenny's daughter was drowsy due to being severely jaundiced, so was placed in special care. After this period of early separation, Jenny found it difficult to get her baby to take the breast, meaning that their stay in hospital was extended. Jenny felt that the staff on the busy neonatal suite did not provide the support she needed. Nevertheless, at the time, Jenny blamed herself for her failure to breastfeed successfully. After struggling for five or six weeks she gave up altogether, deciding to bottle-feed instead. However, out of a sense of failure she kept this information from her health visitor who, as a strong advocate of breastfeeding, she felt would have been critical of her decision. Jenny's final reflections on the matter were that breastfeeding, unlike, as she put it, 'the more instinctive aspects of motherhood, like being able to soothe one's child', was something which had to be learned and supported.

As with Jenny, 1990s mother, Maxine's reflections on her own experience of breastfeeding led her to conclude that she too had been let down by the system. Following a traumatic and exhausting birth experience, Maxine was afforded little support to establish and persist with breastfeeding. As with Jenny, she thought this was in no small part due to a lack of available staff on the maternity ward to provide support for this aspect of care. 1970s mother, Anthea, concurred with the view that women need considerable support if they are to breastfeed successfully. Anthea began her professional life as a children's nurse, later training as a midwife and still later becoming a breastfeeding counsellor for The National Childbirth Trust. Out of her extensive experience, Anthea concluded that 'nine out of ten women will tell you they did not breastfeed as long as they intended'. Her final remark was: 'You can't separate the emotions of breastfeeding from its practicalities'.

On the question of the amount and quality of advice and support mothers require for successful breastfeeding, 1990s mother Rosie offered a story with a happier outcome. Rosie had initially found breastfeeding very difficult due to her baby being 'colicky'. After several weeks of struggling to feed a discontented baby, a new health visitor came to see her and offered different advice to that previously given. This advice was that Rosie should cut out dairy products from her diet. The health visitor cited evidence from new research which revealed that women can 'leak' their protein intake from dairy products into their breast milk and some babies find this difficult to tolerate. Rosie followed the health visitor's advice with a happy outcome: 'To cut a long story short', she said, 'it changed our lives *completely!*' Rosie's story perhaps serves to demonstrate the ways in which the availability of appropriate advice and support for mothers is often dependent on luck and circumstance.

Being responsible for a new, helpless and vulnerable person is one of the greatest challenges a new mother has to face. During the gestation period of nine months or thereabouts, in the majority of cases the mother and child dyad operates as an unproblematic team. However, once in the world, the baby is at one and the same time both separate and dependent presenting a challenging inter-mix of issues for the mother to deal with. However, being expected to know how to care for a baby in the early neonatal period without informed support can prove challenging for many new mothers, as the data testifies. Sometimes there are problems of limited duration concerning issues of sleeping or feeding, but nonetheless causing high parental anxiety in the early days. Consideration is now given to the impact on the mothers of crying or difficult-to-settle babies. This is contrasted with the positive effect on them of having quiet and contented babies whose routines were easy to establish and sustain.

(iii) *Crying babies*

There are always so many different explanations...

(Liz, 1990s mother)

A baby is able to communicate its needs only in a limited number of ways, the main one being crying. A general understanding of crying in human society is that crying is a sign of distress or unhappiness therefore generating concern in those around. The anxiety caused by their babies' sometimes persistent crying was articulated by several mothers across the focus groups. In fact it appears that a restless, dissatisfied baby was a critically determining factor in levels of maternal insecurity and exhaustion in the early weeks. This situation is graphically described by 1990s mother, Rosie:

My son, when he came, I mean he screamed non-stop for the first six weeks ... I just wanted to give him back, I just thought my life had ended. I can remember, he was born in winter and you know the hospital, it was really hot, so when we got home

we had the heating on full-blast, ninety degrees, 24 hours, and I was just this hot, sweaty creature ... such a huge trauma!

The experience of trying to cope with her screaming and difficult-to-settle baby was extremely distressing for Rosie and a source of considerable frustration and anxiety. Eventually, the problem with her baby was resolved, as discussed above. Similar experiences of their babies persistently crying were related by several of the participants representing both generations. 1970s mother Judy, for example, recalled the experience of her difficult to settle babies:

And I really wanted the children and I often used to think 'I'm glad I really want you!' when it was in the middle of the night and they wouldn't go to sleep ... and I'd cheerfully have thrown him out of the window and I used to feel very sorry for those mothers who didn't want those crying children ...

Judy was concerned to soothe her crying baby as best she could, at the same time feeling very frustrated about her situation. Her way of dealing with her crying baby, she went on to explain, was in contrast to that which her own mother had advocated: 'Well, if the baby cries, you just shut them in another room!' her mother had said. There was general agreement in Judy's 1970s focus group that *their* mothers may well have given this advice too. Judy continued: 'I didn't want to do that, but you couldn't stop them crying ... it makes you very anxious. I didn't have a night's sleep for five years'. Hayward (1998) highlights a particular difficulty for a mother whose baby is hard to settle when she is trying to find a shape in her life that allows her to be a mother.

When, as in one or two cases, the women's own mothers were approached for advice, some recalled that they brought greater confusion into the situation, as indicated by Judy's example. The issue of different generations advocating different approaches to motherhood was highlighted by another 1970s mother, Anthea, who had been brought up in the early

1940s when the advice had been to keep to a strict feeding routine for babies: 'I was a screwed up Truby King baby... I was told that I cried and cried and my mother sat on the stairs and just listened and watched the clock...'. Truby King argued that an infant's pattern of sleeping and feeding should be entirely predictable if established early on by the mother. In the light of the different models available, when she became a mother herself Anthea found she was unsure about how to proceed with her own crying baby. As indicated, there are different generational and professional 'wisdoms' and these can confuse a new mother desperately trying to understand her baby's distress and what she should do about it.

A baby's persistent crying, it was agreed by several research participants, significantly undermines a new mother's inclination to trust her own instincts:

Liz: The trouble is, you tie yourself in knots ... I used to think with my daughter: 'She must be crying because she's hungry'. So then you feed her ... then you think 'I must be feeding her too much, but if I cut it down ...' You can always still be doing the wrong thing, there are always so many different explanations ...

A baby who is contented, on the other hand, builds confidence in early motherhood. Whilst some of the mothers related difficult experiences, others offered more positive accounts.

(iv) Contented babies

*I remember that first six months with great fondness...
it was a bit of a honeymoon period*

(Debbie, 1990s mother)

Whilst several of the mothers indicated that prior to giving birth they did not know much about babies and were unfamiliar with ways of meeting their needs, if their babies presented themselves as calm and unproblematic, the women quickly established

mothering confidence. Importantly, they were able to behave instinctively, as was the case with 1990s mother Debbie. She explained that although she had not known previously how to care for a baby, her daughter afforded a smooth transition into motherhood: 'It was the easiest part of her growing up actually...the easiest part...'.

Several of the other mothers explained, however, that even if there were difficulties with their babies in the beginning this stressful period lasted for only a short time and the infants soon settled down and established satisfactory feeding and sleeping patterns. It was revealed in the analysis that a baby's 'mother-friendly' behaviour at times was connected with the women's perceptions of their own 'mothering competence'. An example of this is highlighted in an amusing exchange between two 1970s mothers, Barbara and Joan. In a somewhat self-congratulatory manner, Barbara was explaining that she had given birth to 'two very good babies'. This, she recalled had been 'fortunate' because she 'hated losing sleep'. Joan responded to Barbara's apparent smugness: 'They knew that, you see: they knew they'd end up being in *awful* trouble!' Ignoring Joan's remark, Barbara went on to explain that her explanation of this phenomenon was that when she was pregnant she had maintained a regular sleep pattern herself and her babies had picked up on this routine. Joan disagreed that this was necessarily the case, providing evidence from her own experience: 'No, that theory's destroyed if you have one like my first that slept though the night after six weeks and the other who didn't sleep through for seven years! So that puts paid to those theories!'

The analysis revealed that a critical requirement for motherhood is the ability to live with uncertainty, and new mothers can serve a hard apprenticeship in this regard. Both parents can feel like raw recruits, from the first day of their child's life and then at the onset of every stage of its development, each presenting new challenges and new satisfactions

(Ulanowsky, 1987). Overall, the data strongly indicated that the women's experience of motherhood, at least in its early stages, was very much 'child dependent'. As illustrated above, whilst a calm and contented baby affords an early boost to confidence, this was undermined for mothers whose babies cried a lot or were difficult to settle. Significant levels of support are therefore required for a new mother as she attempts to respond appropriately to the uncertainties of her baby's health and temperament. It is to this matter that I now turn.

4. Advice and Support

It is reasonable to suppose when faced with a new and challenging role, that individuals living in the information age and operating within professional knowledge frameworks would seek professional advice. However, in consideration of a life role like motherhood, as indicated above, it might also be expected that they would seek advice and support from family and friends experienced in this area. Lynd and Lynd (1929), writing in earlier times, cite several instances of young mothers, eager for advice, seeking help from experienced mothers. Whilst some of the participants in the research reflected on the kinds of advice their mothers might have given (generally in negative terms), very few instances were cited of their actually drawing on this source (Thomson *et al.*, 2008, found similarly). The overall impression was that their preference had been to put their trust in professionals. The discussions above highlight examples of where this input had a positive effect, but also several cases where professional input was found unhelpful by the mothers dealing with the challenges of giving birth and coping with their babies in the early neonatal period.

As indicated, informal sources of advice and support from more experienced mothers were not, it seemed, especially sought by the women and featured little in their accounts (though

two mothers mentioned support from post-natal meetings of mothers organised by the National Childbirth Trust). The assumption was made that the majority of these women lived in places geographically distant from their birth families (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003). Judy, a 1970s mother, certainly regretted living at a distance from *her* family. She related that the students in the classes she taught, who were mostly from ethnic minority groups, had told her that: 'There's always somebody to hold the baby; always somebody to help you out, somebody to give you advice ...' In contrast, Judy reflected on how lonely she had felt as a new mother. Reflecting on the situation for women today she said: 'I think women are very isolated, families are very isolated'. A few participants likewise recalled feeling a powerful need for input from their own birth families when they became mothers. However, they recognised the obstacle of distance and that their mothers had to share time and energy with other family members, and, with regard to the 1990s generation, sometimes with careers.

In some of the focus groups the women's relationships with other family members such as sisters were mentioned. However, in cases when both sisters became mothers at around the same time there was rivalry concerning who was performing 'best' and doing things 'right'. Friends and colleagues were presented in a more positive light overall than family members, by the 1990s mothers especially. Friendships are considered in the final section of the chapter, where social networks are discussed. The section which follows next looks at the role of fathers, a critically important source of support for mothers.

5. Fathers and Partners

(i) *Preamble*

Throughout the past two decades or so the subject of fatherhood has become an area of significant intellectual enterprise (Connell, 2002; Fisher, 2008; Thomson *et al.*, 2008). As

explained in Chapter 1, because motherhood is an extensive topic the issue of fatherhood is considered in this thesis only where it has been judged necessary to do so. With reference to the literature, this short preamble highlights some features of fatherhood salient to motherhood; these features are then developed in more detail in the discussion that follows.

Evidence from the data indicates that all the fathers of the firstborn children of the participants were living with them, at least in their children's infancy. A point to note before the discussion proceeds is that, in the research, the issue of the marital status was not raised, so no assumptions are made. For this reason, the term 'partner' is used in discussion of the parental relationship.

Whatever the partner relationship, the data revealed that the ways the women experienced motherhood could not be viewed independently of the ways their men had defined fatherhood. Through history, as with motherhood, fatherhood has been subject to specific cultural positioning broadly linked to representations of male and female roles in western society (Connell, 2002). In this regard, traditional gender demarcation, of mothers connected to home and family and fathers as breadwinners, continued well into the 1970s (Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1976; Storkey, 1985). The daily reality for many mothers of the 1970s generation therefore was of being alone in the daily task of childcare, encapsulated in the words of 1970s mother Sue: 'I felt like a single parent'.

However, in the years between the 1970s and the 1990s the lives of mothers changed, with considerably more returning to work while their children were still in infancy, as discussed. Participants who worked full-time indicated that they enjoyed a more equal sharing of responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks with their partners than part-time working mothers, who generally continued to take on the lion's share. This circumstance is

confirmed in the literature (Popillion, 2000; Williams, 2000; Hwang, 2006). Additionally, mothers are recorded as managing a greater task density (sometimes called 'multi-tasking') in home and family work than fathers (Craig, 2006).

Notwithstanding this circumstance, recent research indicates that modern fathers desire more involvement in family life than they currently have (Fisher, 2008). However, consideration of the data in this present research reveals that patterns of early neonatal care established by the mothers in some cases had an excluding effect on fathers. Generally speaking, the mothers were in control from the start, and, if breastfeeding, the boundaries of gender responsibility were further cemented. The accounts of 1990s mothers Anna and Liz, for example, described below, highlight their overall management of the family environment, which they indicated had perhaps left inadequate space for their partners fully to play their part. However, others might interpret this situation as a willingness on men's part to cede responsibility for the management of home and family to women (Craig, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2008).

The literature reveals a more traditional gender role demarcation in parenthood than in other aspects of modern life, allowing men to reap the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 2002). Some participants in the research interpreted the behaviour of their men as selfish: as 1970s mother, Marie, put it 'He felt he could do whatever he liked'. Whereas 1990s mother Jane, had noted that her partner's social life had stayed relatively unaffected by parenthood whilst hers had, in a sense, been on hold. More broadly, however, by the 1990s, evidence from the literature and from this present research suggests a more egalitarian sharing of parental tasks, especially in couples where the woman has higher education qualifications (Hakim, 1999). However, other evidence suggests that once couples become parents traditional male/female roles are likely to re-emerge, with mothers

playing the major part in organising and sustaining domestic life, especially if they are at home full-time or work only part-time (Cockburn, 2003).

With greater attention to equal opportunities in a less gender-stereotyping late modern context there is opportunity for both men and women to re-evaluate their positioning in relation to parenthood (Willmott and Nelson, 2005). A British survey undertaken in 2005, cited in James (2008), for example, found that 87% of men agreed with a statement that fathers can feel just as confident as their partners in caring for a child. From the same study, the majority of fathers said they would like to be more involved in childcare. Yet the fact remains that for structural, ideological and, some might argue, biological reasons an inequality of care responsibilities between men and women prevails (Fisher, 2008).

Statistically, men do spend longer at work when they become fathers, impacting on how much input they are able to provide in practical terms. It has been found for example in one study that a third of new fathers reported working more than 48 hours a week and had difficulty taking time off work to respond to family needs (Gimson, 2008). Better models of paternity leave arrangements have been available for some time on the continent (Barbier, 1994; Daune-Richard, 1994; Bjornberg, 1994; Hwang, 2006) yet UK systems remain, for the most part, resistant to change.

In summary, the lives of mothers and fathers are differently affected by parenthood (Gimson, 2008). Whilst the impact of fatherhood on men is registered as not insignificant, the impact of motherhood on women is life-changing (Hwang, 2006). Into the 1990s some enduring gender patterns and attitudes persisted, as discussed (Connell, 2002). Yet, it is argued, with more satisfactory role rationalisation at both the personal and policy levels, the productive and reproductive activities of both mothers and fathers need not be in conflict (Joshi, 2008).

With change becoming manifest it might be expected that fatherhood as constructed in 1990s would be in clear contrast with that of the 1970s. To some extent the research provided evidence that this was the case, but not exclusively so. Before this question is explored it is important to register the different interpretations of the concept of 'support' as between the two generations. For example, in the 1970s a man working long hours to earn a living and build his career to sustain home and family might judge himself, and be judged by his society, to be providing correct and adequate support in his role as a father. However, by the 1990s a different interpretation of 'support' became part of social understanding, encompassing wider emotional and practical elements. A further point for consideration is that into the 1990s a traditional notion of support for families (i.e. as 'economic') has increasingly relied on the earning power of mothers too.

The later decades of the twentieth century brought greater fluidity of positioning along a continuum of gender. The two subsections which follow examine some different styles of fatherhood along this continuum which the mothers who took part in the research had personally observed and experienced.

(ii) '1970s-style' fathers

*I would have loved to have had a husband who
was more at home and took more care, could
share, but...*

(Marie, 1970s mother)

The reality of long working days outside the home impacts on the lives of families, and in current times both parents may be involved. In the 1970s, it was primarily the father who followed this work/life pattern. As described, most middle class women at that time gave

up their careers when they became mothers. This was not the case for Janet, however, who returned to employment a few weeks after the birth of her baby, as described above. In the extract below Janet describes the early days of parenthood for herself and the baby's father:

I'd not known my husband very long when we got married. He had quite a long engineering apprenticeship and we'd got basically very little, financially, behind us. We were married in the December and my son was born the following October so it was hardly time to settle down to any married life really and to make a financial difference. He actually worked permanent nights and he carried on working permanent nights for five years ... I'd no great thoughts about motherhood, I mean it was something we never really discussed, like it was thrust upon you, you know. Like here was this baby, the next thing on the list, it just appeared ... I was working full-time and maternity leave was six weeks before the baby was born and six weeks after... The other part of it was how do you have a new-born baby when somebody's trying to sleep upstairs during the day? It's really very difficult...

Janet's partner had not long established his career before they became parents, so they were not economically stable. As Janet explained, her maternity leave allowance was limited to six weeks before the birth and six weeks after. When the baby was six weeks old, Janet's mother took on his care. Janet described their routine of rising early, after which she would leave for work. A partnership of responsibility was soon established whereby, on returning from his night shift, her partner would get the baby ready and take him to her mother's and then come home and sleep for a few hours before collecting the baby again. Janet continued:

We had a quick tea together and then he went off to work and I was left with the baby in the evening. Sounds horrendous, but actually, it worked reasonably well ... I'd nothing else to compare it with you know, we struggled through. The downside was I never really got to know my son very well ...

No such partnership of responsibility was available to Viv, another 1970s participant. Viv, like Janet, explained that she too had been 'catapulted' into motherhood in her early 20s, when she discovered she was pregnant in the week of her university finals. She married immediately after graduation. In the early months of parenthood Viv's partner, needing to establish his teaching career alongside fulfilling his commitments as a County sportsman, was very much an absent father. Viv had found this difficult to accept. Disappointment and frustration with her life as a new mother came across very strongly some three decades on:

I resented my husband every day he went to work and there was active resentment ... I just hated him because he had everything I wanted and there was me stuck at home with this baby!

To a certain extent Betty and Joan endorsed Viv's experience, recalling how in the 1970s they too had found it hard to tolerate their partners' long hours away from home building and sustaining their careers. Joan remarked: 'There were times when the children were young ... I felt like a single parent really because of the demands work was making on him'. It is clear from the discussions between the 1970s mothers that some partners were aware of their situation as new mothers operating alone, although powerless to do anything about it. Other fathers, however, were less aware and less concerned. This was highlighted in a short exchange between Sue and Judy:

Sue: When he was there, he was very good and, but he'd work late and the children would be in bed pretty early ... He was not there most of the time ...

Judy: And they forget!

Sue: He thinks he was there ... And when the children, you know what they're like when they get to the adolescent (stage), you feel like saying: 'Well, you know, you were never there when they were small!' And it's completely gone from his memory that that was the case ...

Some of the mothers had regretted the lack of partner input in parenting, feeling this met neither their own personal needs nor those of their children. In Joan's view this contributed

to problems in adolescence. For others, however, it was when their partners were unreliable, making promises that they did not keep, that they felt most let down. Marie, one of the 1970s mothers, explains: 'What I minded was that he said he would be at home at a certain time and he never really was. And if I was having to go somewhere, I couldn't go ... he'd arrive home four or five hours late'. Marie reflected further on her situation wondering whether, in retrospect, she should have been more assertive and challenging about her husband's behaviour for 'He felt he could do whatever he liked'. In several cases with the earlier generation it appeared that unreliability, lack of awareness and self-centredness on their men's part had left some of the women lonely and unsupported in motherhood. In Marie's case this behaviour also undermined her chances of taking up study towards a career change, an ambition only realised when her children were older.

However, some couples, even in the 1970s, had attempted to establish alternative models of sharing paid work and childcare. For example, Joan described how she and her partner had hoped to challenge gender stereotypes of male earning and female caring (Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Oakley, 1974). They planned that when their baby came along they would both work part-time. However, this had not worked out, and, in the end Joan took five years out of her career to be a full-time mother. With regard to this question of role exchange, 1970s mother Janet recalled an example of a father in her neighbourhood who had challenged dominant 1970s stereotypes by becoming a house-husband. Janet said that his wife preferred working or walking the dogs to looking after the children. Being a house-husband, however, stigmatised her partner. His name was Philip, but, in the neighbourhood, he became known as 'Phyllis'. In the 1970s, the role of 'house-husband' appeared socially unacceptable, yet the data provides evidence that these perceived negative connotations persisted, in some cases, into the 1990s. For example, Geraldine's partner, who was home-bound due to ill-health, described himself, when in company, as a

‘domestic engineer’. Geraldine was not sure whether this was in jest or to legitimise the role.

On the question of stigma and social approbation in the 1970s with respect to men as full-time carers, Barbara brought up the issue of a woman friend who worked full-time and whose partner had taken on the responsibilities of home and baby. On days when the health visitor was expected the mother would take time off work to be present. However, on these occasions, both parents were made to feel embarrassed when the health visitor, whilst fully aware of the arrangements, would address all her comments and questions to the mother, ignoring the father’s presence. This again appeared to indicate a stigma around men taking on care and domestic roles at that time. When the issue of men as carers came up in the 1990s focus groups, however, the general view was that there was of a loosening of gender demarcation in relation to childcare and domestic work.

Before this discussion of fathers in a 1970s context is drawn to a close, a further dimension, this in relation to workplace culture, is briefly discussed. Whilst into the new millennium the issues of parental leave and flexible work arrangements are very much on the agenda, in the 1970s such arrangements rarely featured, and, when they did, were presented negatively. This was highlighted by Jill, who said that in the 1970s a father who took parental leave would be viewed in his workplace as ‘not a real man; not to be taken as a serious employee’.

The overall impression from several of the 1970s participants was that their men had given little practical support for parenting. Social attitudes concerning gender role ascription, they implied, had played a part in this, alongside a reality of their men as breadwinners working long hours to support the family. However, the partners of some mothers involved

in the research took advantage of these circumstances to remain completely uninvolved in the day-to-day care of their children.

There was evidence from the 1990s participants that the experience of a small number of couples mirrored that of the 1970s. Examples of such behaviour are from Jane and Yasmin, who each opted to stay at home to care for their infant children. Jane's frustration rested on the fact that, due to the time and energy required to run the home and care for the children, she had given up most of her outside interests such as playing in an orchestra and having occasional evenings out in town with her sister. In contrast, however, she noted that her partner had managed to carry on with *his* leisure interests, such as playing golf. Jane described how her life as a new mother lacked variety and stimulation: 'I think when they're babies and you're there, all the time, all day and all night ... I felt quite bitter and resentful'. This situation of mothers having to make considerably more adjustments in their lives for children than fathers is endorsed by recent research conducted in Sweden by Hwang (2006), who found that in many cases this persists when mothers return to the workplace.

Yasmin managed to work part-time whilst caring for her two young children because this employment, on contract to a university, was primarily home-based: 'There's times when I've marked assignments holding the baby ... and trying to keep the baby quiet as well, you know, trying to juggle ...'. However, Yasmin was expected to take on all the responsibility for the children, even at the weekends when their father was around. When she asked her partner for help and support, he would simply suggest that *she* went out to work and *he* would stay at home with the children. Yasmin concluded 'But I don't want that either, I want to be there for them like, part-time, you know, the good bits!' Research by Reynolds *et al.* (2003) supports the idea that mothers need partner support if they are to

find time for themselves. However, analysis of the data collected from the 1990s reveals, overall, situations more positive than those of Jane and Yasmin, even though, for many, the fathers' input remained gender defined (Craig, 2006).

(iii) '1990s-style' fathers

My husband is an incredibly good 'new man'

... he's a very good hands-on dad

(Rosie, 1990s mother)

Whilst the following discussion presents examples of what might be termed '1990s-style' fathers, the views of both generations are drawn in. However, it is the personal experiences of the 1990s women, recounted in the focus groups, which give substance to the analysis of what 1990s-style fatherhood really consists of. Some views of 1970s participants, however, are considered first.

Jill, one of the 1970s mothers, observed a growing legitimacy for men to take a more substantive role in day to day family life. She cited the instance of her son-in-law, who, although in a 'high-powered' job, would take time off equally with her daughter if the children were ill. Even so, research by Popillion (2000) and Williams (2000) suggests that a situation of evenly-balanced gender responsibility is still far from the norm, with mothers continuing to take prime responsibility for children and home, sometimes even when working full-time themselves. 1970s mother Barbara concurred with this analysis, observing that there are still many men who plainly do not want to get involved in work concerning home and children, which can leave mothers overstretched and unsupported. Viv agreed: 'For every new man, there's ten that still see it as a woman's job!' The 1970s mothers developed their discussion, pointing out that over time men's careers have benefited greatly from women taking on the responsibilities of childcare and home-

making, a situation recognised by Connell (2002). The majority of participants were of the opinion that, unlike the case cited by Jill above, it was primarily the mother who takes time off work when a couple's child is ill. In one of the 1990s group discussions Maxine gave testimony to this: 'That resentful feeling is creeping in now: why is it just me dealing with this?'

Feminist discourse had earlier warned that men would be unwilling to change the status quo of having the freedom to pursue careers unhindered by domestic responsibilities, realising they would lose power, prestige and material benefits thereby (Chodorow, 1978). More recently, Cockburn (2003) observes that women continue to be conditioned to fulfil the role of sustaining domestic life.

Some participants recognised that in many ways workplace culture remains unsupportive of change, a circumstance discussed earlier. 'I think there are lots of fathers who would be willing to do it, but simply couldn't do it, because of the, you know, culture in the workplace', said Joan. As indicated above, paternity leave, whilst increasingly part of policy consideration in the United Kingdom, continues to present significantly less favourable conditions than arrangements enjoyed for some time in countries on the European mainland, as indicated (Barbier, 1994; Bjornberg, 1994; Daune-Richard, 1994). An encouraging trend in Sweden for example records fathers as taking extended leave following maternity/paternity arrangements. The figure rose from 7% in 1987, to 9.9% in 1997, reaching 18.7% by 2004 (Hwang, 2006). Whilst not presenting a situation of parity, it indicates a more encouraging direction than is so far evident in the United Kingdom.

Notwithstanding the persistence of culture and conditioning, and recognising that fathers have some way to go for mothers to achieve equity, some of the 1990s participants cited

examples where their partners did take a fair share of day-to-day parenting and household tasks. However, it was noted that fathers in a care role still attract public attention as being somewhat outside the norm, albeit that paternal care is placed in a more positive light than in the 1970s. For example, remarks made by women in a mother and toddler group when two young children were brought in by their father were recalled by 1990s mother, Jane:

'Wow, a man! Isn't he good? He's holding the baby. Look how he's feeding it and isn't the baby lovely and clean? Would you like a hand?' And another parent, a mum with three kids, really struggling and nobody bats an eyelid. But you see this man, and, he's wonderful!

1990s mother Jenny agreed that a public perception of such men is 'very romantic'. In the United States, Lorber (1994:13) observed an increase of men in charge of young children and that such men would be smiled at approvingly, as if gaining 'silent applause' from those around them. However, it is important to recognise overall a growing phenomenon in the western world of men demonstrating increasing flexibility around gender role ascription with a good many wishing to be more involved in the care of their children (James, 2008).

1990s mother Debbie, for example, reported that both she and her partner were very comfortable with their recent exchange of roles:

A lot of what you're sharing would probably be what my husband would identify with, 'cos he's at home looking after her: the traditional 'motherhood' role is with him ... I'd have gone demented if I'd stayed at home!

Debbie admired how 'laid back' and patient her partner was with their daughter, apparently content to play with her for hours. However, when Debbie was asked by other members of the group if her partner managed the housework too, she replied that generally he did not, and that this responsibility had stayed with her. Debbie, however, had recently noted an

'improvement' in her partner in this respect. As this was the case, she would continue to thank her partner for any household task he did extra to looking after their child: 'Cos, I just think: "Encourage him". You see, I'm a trainer!' This requirement for men to be thanked for their domestic contributions was recognised by other members of Debbie's focus group. Jane, for example, noted that her husband always reminded her if he'd brought in the washing and had not been thanked. Jenny responded to this circumstance with a remark that if male partners were thanked every time they did anything in the home, it might perpetuate the notion that the responsibility for chores was always the woman's. Hakim (1999: 39) comments on a more 'egalitarian sharing' of both paid and unpaid labour in cases where the woman has higher education qualifications. However, when children come along, she notes, this balance becomes unstable, with a more traditional pattern of mothers managing the major domestic load taking over, as discussed above.

The data indicated that discussion developed with respect to certain differences between men's and women's styles of parenting. Several of the mothers noted that they would accept 'greater task density' in the home than their partners, observing a male preference to focus on one task at a time, a finding endorsed by Craig (2006: 276). Others observed, however, that a man's aversion to multi-tasking was more attitudinal than biological. And some participants were unsure of the extent to which this circumstance is a result of centuries-old conditioning for mothers to provide responsive parenting alongside efficient home-making, or, on the other hand, something to do with their biological make-up.

The issue of whether fathers were as 'tuned in' to children as mothers emerged in the group discussions between 1970s mothers. Betty, for example, recalled her impression that her partner was 'being all he could be' when he helped with the children. However, she observed that he would take on an almost child-like attitude when playing with them,

which occasionally meant that he would not pay 'adult-type regard' to the children's safety. Other mothers too observed a tendency for their partners to 'get alongside' the children and 'really play' on their level, disregarding other needs. Earlier psychoanalytic studies which look at male styles of baby-care note how some fathers treat the baby almost as an object or toy, stimulating and exciting it (Chodorow, 1978: 81).

It would be interesting to see if these gender patterns change with the gradually increasing incidence of fathers taking on the full-time care of their children, albeit that recent research indicates that fathers and mothers remain inclined to parent differently. An extensive Australian study, for example, presents clear evidence that 'there is a dissimilarity in the way fathers and mothers parent' (Craig, 2006: 274). This study also confirmed variability in task allocation between mothers and fathers, with mothers concerned more with primary care activities and fathers with interactive care activities like talking to, playing with, reading to, teaching, and reprimanding children (Craig, 2006: 270). Of significance is Craig's (2006: 276) conclusion that policy makers 'cannot assume that a masculinization of women's work patterns is concomitant with a masculinization of their care responsibilities'. Evidence from the present research was in broad agreement: whilst 1990s fathers made a greater contribution than the 1970s fathers had done, the mothers continued to take overall responsibility for the management of home and children. 1990s mother Liz remarked: 'It's a responsibility thing ... I'll be the one that sets out the tasks and he decides who's going to do these different tasks'.

1990s full-time mother Anna introduced a different dimension to this circumstance, citing her sometimes controlling approach towards matters of home and children. Anna explained how she has the urge to sort out every small detail when leaving the children in their father's care which her partner finds extremely irritating. Some other 1990s mothers

agreed, locating the problem in a mother's perception that she needs to be responsible for the overall well-being of young infants. One said: 'She's bonding with the baby, so it's very difficult for the man to feel confident doing it'. For all that, in gender terms this phenomenon might be viewed as patriarchy in reverse. Liz, however, suggested that breastfeeding might be the cause, having the effect of setting up an imbalance from the start. Liz explains:

For the first six months, you are the person the baby ultimately wants... even if it's not that they want feeding, it's so easy to get to that point when you've tried two or three things and then ...[the baby's father says] 'I think she's hungry, you'd better take her!'

Whilst this might imply a situation of men opting out, Liz reflected on how difficult it can be for the partners of breastfeeding women to find a role for themselves, especially in the early weeks. Chodorow (1978) notes how lactation both increases and extends mother/child intimacy, and that the natural connection between child-bearing and lactation can extend to a perception of a natural connection between mothers and caring.

Notwithstanding this point, in the research several of the 1990s mothers cited instances of their men providing some critical elements of practical support in the early weeks, including shopping and cooking. However, the overall impression from the 1990s mothers was that even when their partners took on their full share of the tasks of child-rearing and home management, they were judged as not quite coming up to their own standards. Not the least important factor, some felt, was that the fathers did not have their own levels of intuition and sensitivity concerning children's needs.

This extensive discussion of the role of fathers and partners has drawn on data collected from both generations of mothers involved in the research. Although separating out the women's perceptions of 1970s fatherhood from 1990s fatherhood, the discussion revealed

that it is not always possible to draw clear lines of demarcation between the two generations. Discussions of male role positioning in relation to domestic responsibilities and childcare occurred in the focus groups representing both generations of mothers. Overall, whilst change and improvement in men's contribution to family life was recognised, this was seen as a gradual process and, for the most part, not fully reflective of the mothers' increased involvement in employment outside the home.

Additional to the input of fathers, wider support networks were also viewed by the mothers as important. The next, final, section completes the discussion by focusing on opportunities for social engagement for mothers, for companionship and, in some cases, as routes to self-development.

6. Social Networks

For many working women, becoming a mother can separate them from important social networks. However, depending on context, other interpersonal networks may become available (Everingham, 1994). The discussion which follows reveals the variability of opportunities for social intercourse and support available to the mothers. Variable levels of commitment to developing such opportunities between the two generations are also highlighted.

The majority of the 1990s generation had spent several years building their careers and considerable amounts of time in the company of work colleagues. These female and sometimes male colleagues had become confidantes, companions and friends, affording the women important affirmation and support. As 1990s mother Jenny put it: 'I do get some job satisfaction, [but] it's not the most amazing job in the world, it's the contact with other people'. Having enjoyed significant levels of independence, social activities with their

peers were well-established for the majority of the 1990s participants, as indicated, and often sustained in parallel with their more intimate partnerships. At the same time, the research findings suggest an overall loosening of kin and neighbourhood ties in favour of peer relationships, in common with the findings of other studies (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003; Thomson *et al.*, 2008). However, when they become mothers these relationships were often difficult to sustain for practical and logistical reasons. A further reason for this separation it is suggested, could lie in the difficulty some mothers have retaining friendships with women who are not mothers themselves (Hayward, 1998).

The data indicate that in late pregnancy, and later when caring for a young baby, some participants found difficult to tolerate the long periods of time alone, away from friends, familiar social environments and the stimulation of the workplace. Prior to becoming mothers, most had worked full-time, often at some distance from their homes. The 1990s mothers had found little time and opportunity to establish social networks in their localities. Experiences for the 1970s group of women were somewhat different, not least that several mothers, like themselves, were already home-based. The 1970s mothers indicated that after a short while they had formed and sustained friendships with these local contacts.

The energy and enthusiasm required to seek out opportunities for socialising during the day can be in short supply for a new mother, however. Whilst temporary or transitional relationships are generally difficult to sustain, re-establishing links with members of their ante-natal class already known to them is frequently a first option. However, this does not always have a successful outcome, as 1990s mother Jenny explains:

I found, without sounding awful, there were a lot of people there who the only thing I had in common with was a baby. Sometimes it's like flogging a dead horse really. I went to post-natal group for about a week 'cos I thought I was going a bit mad

and I thought 'I need to get out!' People were friendly, but a lot of them were already in pairs - I'm quite a confident person and find it easy to speak to people but, it was really hard to penetrate...

Like Jenny, 1970s mother Sue also had difficulties coming to terms with having to socialise with women with whom she had little in common except motherhood: 'I can remember when I was pregnant going to this sort of tea afternoon, where people went with their babies, and I thought: "Oh my God, is this what I'm going to have to do?"' In common with Sue, other participants described their sense of discomfort trying to function in social environments when the only link was their babies, and the babies often the only topic of conversation.

Other studies have emphasised the importance of support and social engagement for a woman's healthy transition to motherhood (Lazarre, 1987; Petrowski, 1997). However, two of the 1970s mothers, Jackie and Hilary, were of the opinion that part of the reason modern mothers fail to make and sustain local friendships was an unwillingness to make the effort to locate appropriate networks. Jackie suggested a possible reason for this unwillingness:

I wonder if women think it's not worth making the investment to build up a new network of friends or support group, 'cos you know you're going back to work in six months' time? Because I felt very much, you know, it's sink or swim, go out there, make the contacts, get the friends, otherwise ...

Having decided to be a full-time mother, Jackie herself had made an effort to establish new friendships and locate sources of support. However, she found she had more in common with women who were members of the National Childbirth Trust post-natal groups than with members of her hospital ante-natal group or other network sources. Hilary introduced a further, issue into the discussion: the fact that modern women, predicting boredom and

loneliness in motherhood, would not make sufficient effort to network with others. She also wondered whether the issue for new mothers was one not of 'loneliness' but of 'being alone': 'They'd be bored at home with their child because they're frightened of being on their own with their child. I mean, not with their child, but of being on their own...'

Whilst the experiences of the 1990s mothers of networking with other mothers for mutual interest and support came across as quite negative, the 1970s mothers presented overall a more positive picture. However, even the mothers from this generation indicated that everything did not happen at once, recalling that they too had needed time to adjust to their new role and social environment. Additionally, preschool playgroups were available to them and their infant children (Rose, 1989) plus a range of opportunities for social and intellectual stimulation with like-minded mothers and for personal development. For example, Marie took advantage of a variety of cheap and accessible daytime courses available in her local college. She and her friends would babysit for each other's children to allow any mother who wished to take up this option the opportunity to do so. Gaining extra qualifications by this means opened up the chance of a later career change for Marie once her children were at school. Jill described a different approach to keeping mentally stimulated in parallel with social interaction. She belonged to a group of mothers who would agree on a book of common interest each month in preparation for what Jill described as 'intellectual discussions'. These would take place in one of their homes while the children played in the garden.

Taken as a whole, the 1990s mothers seemed less optimistic about the availability of opportunities for companionship and self-development in new motherhood and appear to have lacked the inclination to set them up themselves. In more recent times there are more on-line opportunities for mother-to-mother connections, for example, www.mumsnet.com.

For some participants of both generations, however, memories of persistent loneliness, isolation and low levels of stimulation remained strong (Davies and Welch, 1986, found similarly). Fiona, living in an isolated situation on the edge of a golf course in the early 1980s, communicated this vividly: 'The window-cleaner would come and he would be the only person I saw...'. However, as indicated, the 1990s generation, appear to have both anticipated and feared loneliness more than the 1970s mothers had done. In summary, the two generations handled their requirement for social engagement differently, the 1970s women by building social networks locally with other 'at-home' mothers and by taking up opportunities to develop themselves through study. The majority of the 1990s generation, in contrast, kept alive links with colleagues from the workplace, to which many would soon return.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has considered in some detail what the research reveals about the women's experiences of early motherhood. The discussion began with a consideration of the birth process and the early neonatal stage, including breastfeeding. Several mothers highlighted the significant effects of both labour and the early neonatal period on their transition to motherhood. Importantly, the condition of their babies following birth was registered as having significant effect on early perceptions of themselves as mothers. For support and guidance, the 1990s mothers had drawn almost exclusively on the input of professionals, albeit that several had found its quality disappointing and confusing (Walter, 1999). The mothers of babies that were relatively routine and contented in their behaviour built early confidence in the role; whereas difficult to settle babies or those who cried a lot brought uncertainty and confusion. The practical wisdom of earlier generations, however, had been largely unsought in this regard, due to geographical and other factors (Thomson *et al.*, 2008).

The different issues considered in this chapter confirm the theme that motherhood does not rest alone on how a mother perceives and constructs it but on other factors also. As might be expected, how the fathers had perceived and constructed *their* role was especially significant. There was clear evidence from participant testimony, broadly in agreement with the literature (Connell, 2002; Craig, 2006; Fisher, 2008; Gimson, 2008; Joshi, 2008), that constructions of fatherhood were influenced by time specific gender norms. However, the men's personal inclinations also played a part. Differences in parenting style and construction between mothers and fathers were recognised by both generations; yet these mothers were unclear whether the source was biological or cultural.

On the question of mothers accessing wider opportunities for support it was revealed that the 1970s environment had proved more conducive to establishing satisfactory and reliable arrangements than the 1990s. However, the planned early return to the workplace for the majority of the 1990s mothers was recognised as not significant in this regard.

Chapter 9

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

1. Introduction

The aim of this research has been to locate differences in the ways that two different socio-cultural contexts - the 1970s and 1990s - influenced and formed women's perceptions of motherhood. An additional aim was to discover any differences in strength of personal agency each generation demonstrated in realising the role.

As indicated, the task of encapsulating realisations of motherhood within two contrasting socio-cultural contexts was at the heart of the research. For the 1970s, an assumption of motherhood as central to the lives of middle class women was revealed (Friedan, 1963; Myrdal and Klein, 1968; Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1976). By the 1990s, however, this assumption was significantly eroded when women melded motherhood with other roles, like paid work (Brannen, 1990; Hakim, 1996; Himmelweit, 2000; Edwards *et al.*, Gatrell, 2002; Reynolds *et al.*, 2003). However, the research revealed a greater complexity of experience for women as mothers than these two summaries might suggest.

The discussion which follows presents first some pivotal issues drawn out of participant experience of both paid and unpaid roles in relation to the changing positioning of motherhood in their lives. Acknowledgement of contrasting norms and values between the two generational contexts is followed by a review of participant experience of early motherhood, including sources of advice and support. Final consideration of the two generational contexts revisits the constructions and constraints for motherhood that emerged from the findings overall. Some tentative suggestions for policy follow.

2. Paid and unpaid work

(i) *Status*

Whilst in the 1970s motherhood had lacked the status of the father's role as breadwinner, these participants were in broad agreement that in their day the role had received not insignificant measures of respect and importance. This finding somewhat deviates from the literature which presents an overall negative view of motherhood at that time, focusing on its monotonous and low-status aspects (Friedan, 1963; Firestone, 1979; Rich, 1976; Oakley, 1979). However, this present research revealed that some 1970s mothers had personally not welcomed the social primacy of motherhood in their lives and had been unwilling to accept its normative positioning for women at that time.

From the 1970s, a social valuing of paid work over the unpaid endeavour of motherhood grew increasingly in strength (Ulanowsky, 1987). Whilst unpaid care had been earlier recognised as valuable and important to society's cohesion, as discussed, its gradual marginalisation in the lives of educated women was noted (Ruddick, 1983; Tronto, 1993). Both generations of mothers recognised this marginalisation as strengthening through the 1990s directed and endorsed by policy which showcased and rewarded 'working families' (Lewis 2002; Edwards *et al.*, 2002). In the later 1990s, whilst state funding became available for professional childcare, such funds remained unavailable for mothers to care for their infant children themselves. The research participants concluded overall that into the 21st century, the value attached to the unpaid work of mothering had considerably diminished, a finding supported by other studies (see, for example, Weaver and Ussher, 1997; Gatrell, 2002; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). Overall, participants from both generations were alert to the ways in which cultural discourse had influenced family policy direction and in turn, women's choices, in their separate contexts.

In their reflections, several 1990s participants observed that a devaluation of motherhood had caused them to devalue themselves as mothers and the complex role they had to perform. They had become convinced that unless they were in employment they were judged pejoratively as 'just a mother'. Several therefore came to the conclusion that they preferred to be defined by their jobs, even when these were part-time and not very high-powered, than by the low and diminishing status of motherhood.

(ii) Mothers returning to employment

A significant number of the 1970s generation involved in the research had not returned to the workplace until their children were of school age and beyond (work by Myrdal and Klein, 1968, and Oakley, 1974, had found similarly). On returning, however, this present research revealed how a proportion of 1970s mothers had progressed to different careers, having made use of their time out of the workplace to gain additional qualifications, and to train for more family-friendly work, like teaching.

The majority of 1990s participants however, had returned to work within twelve months of having their babies, having made a decision to do so when pregnant and uncertain about what motherhood would mean for them. Several concluded that lengthier periods of leave and greater flexibility in work contracts would have allowed them to make decisions more satisfactory for themselves and their children.

The majority of both cohorts returned to work on a part-time basis, a pattern several of the 1970s mothers sustained into middle life and beyond: in some cases jeopardising their professional careers. Additional to considerable cuts in salary, part-time work for many meant taking up positions of diminished quality and status, in comparison with pre-motherhood situations (Hakim, 1996 and Crompton, 1997). Hakim's thesis that the choice

of the majority of mothers is to work part-time is to some extent problematised by these research findings, however. It is suggested that the real preferences of women as mothers are difficult to ascertain when choice was constrained by both ideological and economic factors. Whilst some in the research had welcomed the balance of part-time work and motherhood, others had been of the view that part-time work, often in positions of diminished quality and interest, had been in the nature of 'Hobson's choice'. Also, in the study, there were mothers of young infants working part-time who had not wished to work at all, and a few who would preferred to have progressed their careers full-time had they located affordable and suitable childcare.

Overall the findings revealed that for several 1990s mothers, suitable work arrangements to fit with the needs of both their children and themselves, had been difficult to achieve. A minority, finding work arrangements too problematic to manage alongside motherhood, eventually opted out of employment altogether. A few others had already made the choice to become full-time mothers anyway.

With regard to achieving family-friendly work arrangements, it was concluded from the data that those who worked in male-dominated environments had generally found these unsympathetic to their needs as mothers. Two examples highlighted were the Police Service and banking. These findings endorse Wilkinson's (1994) observations of women working in the Fire Service and Watts' (2007s) study of professional women in the construction industry. Whilst family friendly work arrangements were prioritised by the mothers they were alert to the possibility of childless employees being disadvantaged by special arrangements set in place for parents (Gatrell, 2002).

(iii) *Benefits and drawbacks of paid employment*

Whether they earned money by engaging in paid work or not, both generations indicated that once they became mothers, having money of their own was important for maintaining self-esteem. One full time mother is recorded as insisting on a monthly allowance from her working partner. For others who did not have regular employment, personal earnings from intermittent work had guaranteed a measure of independent purchasing power. Beyond this, in an increasingly insecure relational environment in the later years of the 20th century, women's financial independence was recognised as important. Retaining a foothold in paid employment was one means of ensuring this independence, some thought, whereas others were of the opinion that a measure of financial independence should be assured by state funding. This, they argued, would have the added benefit of demonstrating society's appreciation of their significant contribution to society by raising a future generation, often at considerable cost to themselves.

Gatrell's (2002) research with highly educated professional women reveals the intrinsic benefits for mothers of their remaining attached to careers. Other research by Reynolds *et al.* (2003) endorses this finding that women in high status jobs retain a sense of 'self' through work. Such benefits were highlighted in this present research also, but not to the same extent as in the studies cited. One explanation could be that my sample included a number of semi-professional women working in somewhat lower status jobs, along with professional women in higher status jobs (SOC, 2000). Another explanation might be that my research had drawn in a self-selected sample of women with an interest in talking specifically about 'motherhood', rather than motherhood in relation to work, as in the other studies. Some of my participants, however, still craved the 'real' career achievement of pre-motherhood times, which had been difficult to sustain on part-time arrangements and in a context of family life management, as discussed. Perceptions of 'competence',

‘achievement’ and ‘public valuing’, familiar in their work psyche, sat uneasily alongside their identity as mothers, requiring the somewhat different qualities of nurturance, intimacy and other-centredness (Sullivan, 1993).

Notwithstanding the important personal benefits accrued by some from working, several mothers communicated the high levels of stress they had experienced when trying to manage their dual-role lives (Williams, 2005; James, 2007). However, this stress was set against the financial benefits of working and the affirmation, afforded by work, for their sense of personhood, as discussed. However, the issue of guilt was ever-present for some working mothers. It was unclear from the findings whether this guilt concerned the personal fulfilment they gained from working, over and above caring for their children, or from a sense that by working they were falling short of meeting what they perceived to be appropriate standards for motherhood. However, it was clear that some participants of both generations had placed the responsibility for the achievements or non-achievements of their children at their own door. Perceptions of the ideal, publicly presented, or self-generated, were ever-present in the women’s judgements of themselves as mothers.

In addition, the research findings clearly indicate how the women measured themselves as mothers and in other roles against the socio-cultural expectations of their times. In this regard the majority of the 1970s generation had prioritised motherhood in their lives, communicating a certain sense of satisfaction that they had done so. However, they had recognised how contemporaneous constructions of motherhood in the 1970s had undermined personal opportunity to optimise their chances to be all they could be in roles beyond motherhood. As discussed above, the majority of the 1990s mothers had also responded to contemporaneous expectations constraining them both ideologically and

financially to be functional both as mothers and as earners. As indicated, some revealed the considerable pressure on themselves and their families by so doing.

3. Two generations: Norms, needs and values

The 1970s mothers compared their own materially frugal existences with what they viewed as the 'must have' 1990s generation, a circumstance highlighted by Wilkinson, (1994).

Notwithstanding the growth in consumerist values, it was recognised by both generations that rising living costs both required and encouraged a growing phenomenon of the dual-waged family (Lewis 2002). Two salaries had not been an assumption for middle class parents in the 1970s when, with careful attention to expenditure, the women observed that the family budget could be managed on one salary only, albeit with difficulty. With respect to different generational norms and values, it is interesting to note a contrast in the women's prioritising of the topics for the focus groups discussions (discussed in Chapter 4) where the 1970s participants had prioritised, for example, 'The 24 hour responsibility of motherhood' and 'Balancing rights and responsibilities'. Whereas the 1990s mothers had prioritised 'The importance of status inside and outside the role' and 'Retaining an identity external to motherhood'.

In this regard, differences between the two generations were evident in the different levels of importance they attached to meeting personal needs in a context of motherhood. A firm commitment to personal choice is recognised as a specific feature in late modernity when individuals are urged existentially to realise themselves as persons (Rose, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995; Habermas, 1999). Self-fulfilment, described by Willmott and Nelson (2005: 30) as the '*in*conspicuous consumption' of late modernity emerges strongly in the tenor of what the 1990s participants had to say. This can be

claimed as overall demonstration of their firmer commitment to maintaining personhood in motherhood than their counterparts from the earlier generation had done.

In the introductory chapter to this thesis, the idea of ambivalence in relation to motherhood was discussed with reference to the work of Lizarre (1987) and Parker (1995) revealed by Davies and Welch (1986) through the constructs of dependence and independence.

However, whilst the mothers in my research demonstrated that they were in touch with the personal turbulence of motherhood, feelings of ambivalence did not appear to relate to the role itself, but more to a certain ambivalence evident in their desire to fulfil themselves as parents and also as persons (stronger for the 1990s generation). In practical ways the 1990s generation had been greatly exercised by the moral and practical challenge of dividing their time and energies between motherhood and work, a tension revealed with some definition by Edwards *et al.* (2002) also.

Having a sense of 'falling short' on personal coping when trying to meet the requirements of their children, their employers, their partners and, lastly themselves seems to have been a preoccupation of working mothers of the 1990s. In contrast, pressure on time and energy was not a significant factor in the lives of the 1970s mothers. However, as indicated above, some of these mothers had highlighted the negative aspects of having lost touch with their careers and some others had thought that, in retrospect, they had been somewhat over-involved in their role as mothers, to the detriment both of themselves and their children.

With the benefit of hindsight a small number of both working and the non-working mothers of the 1970s generation wished they had managed motherhood differently.

Full-time motherhood for several of participants had meant losing a sense of the person they had been because the work environment, through its opportunities for social and

professional endorsement, was badly missed. In contrast, some participants actually welcomed their total immersion in motherhood and its encompassing identity, noting with pleasure the positive developments in character and personality it brought. It is noteworthy that whilst some elements of the literature highlight women's fulfilment and personal development in motherhood (see, for example, Ruddick, 1990; de Marneffe, 2006) this feature is often ignored or refuted in literature underpinned by more radical feminist perspectives (Firestone, 1979, Badinter, 1980).

In the research, a minority of participants recorded that they had maintained a psychological distance from motherhood because, in its intensity, they felt they could not be themselves as they wanted to be. These women needed to perceive motherhood as just one facet of their identities. For others still, whilst total immersion in the lives of their babies felt right in the early months, by about half way through the first year they were ready to refurbish other parts of their personalities. Lappen (1993) finds similarly.

The literature suggests that a woman's experience of being mothered can create specific 'relational needs and capacities within her' Chodorow (1978: 51). The findings reveal how models of motherhood presented by the women's own mothers had influenced the women's personal constructions one way or the other. Some had rejected the ways they personally had been mothered whereas others recollected the self-sacrifice and generosity of their own mothers, at times feeling anxious when they judged they had not met these exacting standards. However, a few had reassured themselves that they were living in different times with different expectations and realisations of motherhood. Modern women, they argued should reject the drudgery and low status of motherhood as constructed by an earlier generation and maintain their dual identities both as career-women and mothers. At the same time, as indicated, some participants recalled with a measure of admiration

examples of sensitive and committed childcare shown by earlier generations which they judged as important for the well-being of infants (Fraiberg, 1977; Winnicott, 1979; Whitfield, 1983; Biddulph, 2006). They were sensible, too, of the satisfactions to be had from providing this quality and level of care themselves. However, an abiding tension in their lives between motherhood and other roles had remained, with a satisfactory balance not easily achieved.

4. Early motherhood experience

The section which follows draws out the pivotal issues which emerged concerning issues around becoming a mother and the management of neonatal care including the issues of support and advice. In relation to these questions, certain generational differences were in evidence, though, for the most part the nature of the early motherhood experience was revealed as transcending time and setting.

(i) *The Neonatal period*

The first experience of giving birth features significantly in the biography of any woman. However, data from the 1990s mothers broadly indicated that having a baby and providing for its early care appeared significantly more challenging than was the case for the earlier generation. Birth and the early neonatal stage with its range of unpredictable and uncertain variables appeared to have presented considerable challenge to these confident professionals familiar with exercising significant levels of control and agency in their lives.

As might be expected, the condition of her baby at birth and in the neonatal period is critical to a woman's sense of ease with early motherhood and her adjustment to the role (Kitzinger, 2004). Babies who had manifested physical problems in the early weeks created particular anxiety for mothers in the research, undermining their confidence at this

sensitive time. 'Successful' mothering of a 'perfect' baby had been hoped for and, to a certain extent, anticipated by these advantaged women conditioned to expect measures of success in their lives, a finding endorsed in research by Thomson *et al.* (2008).

Additionally, the negative circumstance of babies who cried a lot or were difficult to settle persistently eroded the mothers' confidence and sense of well-being. Conversely, signals of contentment from the babies had enabled them to build a sense of personal certainty that they possessed the necessary resources and skills for motherhood. The research reveals that no amount of reassurance could work better than the evidence of a contented child, yet sound support and advice had also been critical, especially in the early days.

(ii) *Fathers*

The part played by fathers in supporting mothers emerged as important. The research reveals several ways how time and context had constructed gender, influencing men's parenting practices and levels of input to household tasks (Oakley, 1974; Connell, 2002). The 1970s, for example, communicated a dominant model of women in the home and men in the workplace (Oakley, 1974; Badinter, 1980). In this regard, some mothers recalled feeling like single parents in their task. Notwithstanding men's long hours at work, it was apparent to some mothers that their partners had been unwilling to help, preferring the male stereotype of not getting involved with domestic issues (Connell, 2002). In contrast, several 1990s women had enjoyed the benefit of partners who were 'new men' and 'very good, hands-on dads'. However, these women too, as for the 1970s generation, had borne the major burdens of home-making and childcare in practical and organisational terms. Of interest is that both Hakim (1996) and Edwards *et al.* (2002) present the view that mothers and fathers are differently motivated in relation to balancing paid work and parenting.

Gimson (2008) observes that the imbalance between maternity and paternity rights

continues to support the assumption that it is primarily the mother's life that will be disrupted by parenthood.

Although having greater involvement in childcare than the 1970s fathers had done, the 1990s mothers indicated that their men's quality and style of parenting had remained seemingly gender confined, as discussed in Chapter 8 with reference to Craig's (2006) extensive research. However, some 1990s mothers wondered whether their own gate-keeping of the parenting domain had served to externalise their partners' role, inclining the two parents to an inequality of responsibility from the outset. Nonetheless, the women communicated a view that they and their partners operated in different styles with the children, a finding revealed in earlier research by Chodorow (1978) and more recently by Craig (2006) and James (2007). It was uncertain from what the mothers said, however, whether they thought this difference was biological or socially constructed. It has been observed that the separate and different ways that mothers and fathers construct parenthood in their lives demonstrates traditional features of 'modernity' which have remained powerful in parenting, even in a late-modern context (Walters, 1999).

(iii) Sources of support and advice

In agreement with other research (see, for example, Petrowski, 1997) the findings reveal that adequate support was an important predictor of a women's smooth transition to motherhood. Establishing social networks and accessing sources of advice in the early months emerged as especially significant in this regard. Motherhood caused a separation from familiar social networks and the women's discussions turned on the separate but inter-related concepts of 'loneliness' and 'being alone'. Many had found long periods alone at home with their babies difficult to tolerate. They were hungry for dialogue with other mothers (Lazarre, 1987), yet resisted such contact when it focused exclusively on

babies. The 1970s mothers, anticipating a more protracted period of time at home, had sourced wider and more interesting opportunities for support and self-development than the 1990s mothers. Both generations highlighted post-natal contact with The National Childbirth Trust as beneficial.

As indicated, participant reflections on early motherhood indicated a number to have been somewhat ignorant about the role and its implication for their lives, albeit that the 1990s participants especially were committed to making informed choice (Hakim, 1996).

However, selecting the right option for themselves had felt uncertain for these mothers in a late-modern context of competing knowledge claims from ‘experts’, often themselves in a state of flux and revision (Giddens, 1991). Whilst professional help and advice proved unhelpful in several cases cited, resolution to motherhood dilemmas was not sought from lay sources offering time-proven experience such as the participants’ own mothers, Thomson *et al.* (2008) finds similarly. In such circumstances, as argued in Chapter 1, ontological and epistemological securities for the mothers were at risk (Walters, 1999).

(iv) *Childcare*

As discussed in some detail in the thesis, an increasing trend in the later years of the 20th century was for mothers of young infants to return to the workplace, requiring substitute care for their infant children. Care by family members had been available to only a minority of participants, who had considered themselves fortunate. For many others, geographic separation from their birth families made kinship care impossible (Reynolds *et al.*, 2003). Whilst the majority of 1970s mothers looked after their own children, the 1990s participants, to varying degrees, used the services of professional carers, primarily childminders and nurseries. Decisions about settling on options of non-parental care had

been an emotionally draining exercise for several as presented through their detailed and in-depth reflections.

The participants had recognised the ‘reliability’ of nursery settings in contrast to the ‘emotional benefits’ of one-to-one care arrangements, graphically describing the painful processes they went through to make the right choices for their infant children. In their reflections, several mothers revealed an awareness of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1953; Winnicott, 1979). In some ways, participant discussion of childcare, their considerations and the solutions they had reached anticipated conclusions from research with similar groups of women (Biddulph, 2006; Melhuish, 2006).

5. Motherhood: Constructions and constraints

The research generated rich accounts, affording insights into individual phenomenological experience shared with others similarly placed. Whilst the 1970s mothers operated within more traditional role constructions, in a late-modern context, the 1990s mothers registered some significant ways in which traditional authority structures had fallen away (Heelas, 1996; Habermas, 1999). At the same time, this generation also had found that motherhood had been positioned in their lives more by external forces than personal agency.

It was observed in their separate generational contexts, that those who had complied with normative prescriptions (especially when these had harmonised with personal needs and preferences) generated a number of rewards and few penalties. This would include, for example 1970s women who would have chosen full-time motherhood anyway, and 1990s women who found a balance of paid work and motherhood satisfying both personal and family needs. However, working mothers of the 1970s and non-working mothers of the

1990s, having gone against normative prescription, indicated that they had paid both personal and social penalties for their non-compliance.

The second research question required interrogation of the comparative strength of personal agency exercised by the women in their separate generational contexts. Prior to conducting the fieldwork there had been some expectation that 1990s women, mothering in a context of increased opportunity to exercise personal preference, would have demonstrated greater agency in the choices they had made (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). However, this was not found to have been the case. For, as with the 1970s mothers, the historical moment had driven their choices too. It was found that most of the 1990s mothers of young infants had complied with contemporaneous economic and ideological pressures to squeeze motherhood into the interstices of their lives, albeit that several had been reluctant to do so. A cultural interpretation of motherhood, it appears, can no more be resisted in a late-modern context than in earlier times.

Regret was expressed by both generations that respect for motherhood was fast diminishing having been positioned lower and lower down the status ladder as time had gone on, as discussed. However, some 1990s mothers revealed their personal collusion with this perception by publicly presenting themselves through occupational roles (even when they worked very few hours a week) rather than as mothers. The participants indicated that in the 1970s motherhood had been, to some extent, venerated, by the 1990s, they observed that motherhood was likely to be denigrated as an inappropriate full-time role for intelligent, aspirant women.

Within the predictability and, for some, considerable frustration of their day-to-day lives as full-time mothers, the majority of the 1970s women indicated that for them, a construction

full-time motherhood demonstrated a future-oriented philosophy. In early motherhood therefore, most had taken the spotlight off their own needs and focused on their children. In contrast, the majority of the 1990s women (and a minority of 1970s mothers), either by choice or circumstance, had constructed motherhood in ways retaining a present-time orientation by meeting immediate financial and/or personal needs. However, the exigencies of their dual role lives had generated guilt and strain for some, as indicated. On the other hand, some of the 1970s participants constrained by a contemporaneous construction of motherhood as full-time recalled a sense of frustration and resentment that their lives had been, in a sense, on hold. These contrasts can be expressed through a metaphor of 1970s mothers as sailing along in a featureless sea, bored and becalmed; in contrast, the lives of the 1990s mothers are seen as tossed about on stormy seas, sometimes excited yet persistently anxious that the boat may capsize at any time and everything may be lost.

The 1970s mothers had constructed mothering to some extent from earlier models, though there were significant exceptions. In contrast, several of the 1990s mothers involved in the research had explicitly rejected traditional motherhood, committing themselves to models judged as more appropriate to a late modern context. As 1990s mother Emma put it: 'In past generations the child's rights came first and the mother's rights were secondary; in our generation, our right is to keep up with our lives'.

Whilst being both directed by and constrained within their separate contexts, it was recognised that both sets of women became mothers in decades somewhat on the threshold of change, an idea introduced in Chapter 2. By the 1970s, for example, feminist discourse had begun to filter into women's consciousness, alerting them to the unfair constraints of their gender endured for centuries (Friedan, 1963; de Beauvoir, 1997). By the late 1980s,

however, the notion of a woman's right to fulfilment beyond motherhood became part of an agenda for sustained change in women's lives. Their involvement in paid work to this end was an imperative of increasing strength (Ulanowsky, 1987). As the 1990s progressed it was observed that: 'The contemporary social configuration is experiencing a high level of change' (Walters, 1999: 3). Motherhood and paid work became connected in the lives of middle class women as never before. However, the data indicate that by the late 1990s change again was imminent as mothers had begun to question whether they could realistically 'have it all'. A number of the 1990s mothers in the research were clear that the stress and exhaustion of trying to run their dual lives was a new kind of oppression which they felt they must seek to alleviate. Greer (1999b: 3) describes such women as being in a situation of 'fake equality' and 'double jeopardy'.

The mothers made it clear that they needed space, opportunity and adequate support to be mothers in ways of their own choosing without incurring insurmountable economic and professional losses in the short or longer term. They were asking for their needs as mothers, rather than those of the state or of women in general, to be addressed.

Motherhood is essentially about caring for vulnerable others (Gilligan, 1983; Tronto, 1993; Chamberlayne and King, 1997). However, this research reveals how prescriptions for the care of children, constructed in separate times by patriarchal and feminist discourses, have been found unhelpful (Firestone, 1979; Badinter, 1980; Biddulph, 2006). Both mothers and their children have paid the price for simplistic solutions to their complex needs (Grimshaw, 1986; Williams, 2005). The research indicated with some definition therefore the need for a new model of feminism which focuses on women's needs and rights both as persons *and* as parents. This would be an inclusive feminism recognising women's desire to gain fulfilment from all or any of their different life roles with opportunities to meet the responsibilities to themselves and their significant others in ways more of their own

choosing. As Midgely and Hughes (1995: 68) argue, to force mothers into making 'painful choices' is to 'mock' their freedom. True agency can only be exercised by individuals when they are liberated from the structural forces which determine their lives (Grenfell, 2004).

Motherhood across the generations might be viewed as a continuum: at one end a woman's sense of self submerged in her most productive years, in some cases forever, while on the other, a woman so pressured in time, space and energy that she cannot meet the needs of herself and her children. The findings indicate that motherhood, especially in its early years requires a positioning along a continuum of choice more personally satisfactory to mothers and their infants. However, as indicated, in the structural and ideological constraints of both situational contexts this had been difficult to achieve.

6. Consideration of what might be done

(i) *Preamble*

In the light of the research findings I now make some tentative suggestions for possible ways forward. It is clear that a 1970s model of middle class motherhood separated from life and work which dominated western society for over two hundred years is no longer tenable. At the same time, neither, it seems, is the predicament of motherhood presented by the 1990s participants. Here were mothers and their infants having their needs compromised by an inappropriate timing of separation. One problem has been that changing discourses of motherhood have generated changing discourses of childhood. However, whilst adults may adapt to different contextual requirements, the required provision for early nurture has varied only minimally across generations and cultures (Pollack, 1993; Aldgate and Jones, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 3, addressing the needs of infants appropriately establishes sound emotional and social foundations for their later

life (Fraiberg, 1977; Biddulph, 2006; Melhuish, 2006). However, as the research demonstrates, in recent times the developmentally-sensitive first six to twelve month period has been surprisingly the most usual time for disrupting the mother/child relationship. Yet economic realities must be faced, and the needs of mothers and their children must take their place in the context of the wider society, in the same way that a discussion of motherhood must happen in a context of wider debate. It is to these and other matters that I now turn making some tentative suggestions for policy.

(ii) *Parents in the workforce*

Whilst in recent times periods of paid and unpaid maternity leave have become more generous, paternity leave remains tokenistic. Yet women's first preference for childcare is for care by a partner or relative (ESDS, 1995). Later research reveals a strengthening wish by parents to take on more of the care for their infant children themselves (Gimson, 2008). Ideally, paid leave should be interchangeable between partners, each having their job position assured if they wish to negotiate time out. However, a realisation of parental rights through more flexible and family-friendly employment can come at cost to employers and to the economy as a whole. In the longer term, parents may pay the price if employers perceive their demands as too costly to bear.

As discussed, an increase in flexible and part-time employment has facilitated ever greater numbers of mothers with infant children remaining attached to the workplace. The benefits of part-time work for mothers have been identified alongside evidence that this mode can serve to rationalise women's exploitation in the workplace as well as in the home (Crompton, 1997; Oakley, 1997). It probably does, but this discussion is about finding compromises between several competing needs, as indicated, and compromises are rarely perfect for any party. With respect to full-time work for women who wish to maintain their

professional careers consideration might be given to employment arrangements which do not function on the long hours' model of male availability (Watts, 2007a).

Calculating work through monthly or even annual hours could afford increased flexibility, as suggested by Wilkinson (1994). Additionally, job-share opportunities, identified in the research as preferable to part-time contracts, should be increased and implemented by employers with greater imagination and commitment. On the part of government, giving consideration to four rather than three school terms might also prove a more workable option for working mothers than the current three terms with the long summer break. In this research a quantification of women's separate paid work and motherhood roles was revealed as compartmentalising activities not easily quantified and compartmentalised. The concept of 'quality time' has more meaning for parents, than for their children it seems (Williams, 2005).

Extended periods of funded leave for parenthood is one suggestion to relieve the pressure on women's dual role lives in early motherhood. Maternity or paternity leave of one to two years' duration may actually be preferred by employers over current arrangements when professional positions are difficult to fill on temporary arrangements. One-(or) two-year contracts might further afford work experience opportunities for the burgeoning number of young graduates in Britain. However, for this to operate efficiently employers would need to be allowed by law to take on young people on starter/apprentice rates with a promise of training on the job. This would require adjustment in staff positions to accommodate for lack of experience. This option might go some way to satisfying the needs of employers, young people and the government by helping to meet skills targets and increase graduate employment levels. Not the least benefit would be for infant children and their parents by creating space and balance in their lives. Further to this, time taken out for parenting

should be seen by employers as a period of skills development, potentially for later utilisation in work settings, and salaries should reflect this (Midgely and Hughes, 1983).

(iii) Payment for parenting

It is argued that caring for children is important work in any society and should be considered by governments in cost/benefit terms (Lewis, 2002; Radzik, 2005). The state currently provides fairly substantial funding to meet the cost of professionalised childcare (HM Revenue and Customs, 2005), as discussed. However, it is proposed that on grounds of equity, these funds should be put at the disposal of parents to be utilised as they see fit. For example, if both parents choose to go out to work they could delegate paid care to a friend or family member if that is their choice; alternatively they may wish to use the professional services of nurseries or approved childminders. On the other hand, mothers or fathers may make a personal choice to draw on such funds to supplement the family income if one partner wishes to stay at home to care for their infant child/children. The idea of a parenting wage is not new, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Badinter, 1980; Lewis, 2002). Making funding available for parents to organise childcare according to personal choice would place the power of decision-making back with them rather than with the state, as has been increasingly the case (Carling, 2002).

What is suggested may not be the cheapest option for a government needing to meet increased costs in a context of the potential loss of one tax-paying parent in families with infant children. However, models of care which account for the needs of all critical parties, it is argued, provide more equitable choices for mothers and fathers and, arguably, better outcomes for their children, meaning less cost to the state long term (Fraiberg, 1977; Whitfield, 1983; Biddulph, 2006; James, 2008). If the mother or father becomes a full-time carer, any pensionable years lost should be financially adjusted through manipulation of

the tax/benefit system. It is strongly argued that parents who have taken time out of their careers to care for infant children should not be penalised in retirement.

(iv) 30-month plan

Parents cannot expect everything to be left to policy, however. Having a child is an important life event requiring considerable foresight, planning and adjustment at a personal level. The first 30 months of a child's life is a critical developmental period requiring high-quality, reliable and secure nurture and considerable readjustment of parents' lives as discussed. It is therefore suggested that parents should draft for themselves a '30-month plan' dating from the expected birth of their baby. In this way, parents could anticipate the best time for their child for a gradual integration into non-parental care and early years settings.

Plans and strategies would need to be set in place in anticipation of everyone's needs: mothers, fathers and children. The benefits to a child of one parent withdrawing from paid work for a while, in a sense, to stand still, so she/he can progress in the best way possible, needs to be recognised. Then, satisfied as a parent and refreshed as a person, a mother or father might resume their career with new enthusiasm and vigour. Flexibility would need to be built into any plan to allow for a change of mind once the baby is born. Careful planning, appropriately resourced, could prevent the lives of mothers being constructed by force of circumstance rather than by individual need and preference (Hakim, 1999). As indicated, fathers need to be brought into the work and parenthood equation. Levels of full-time fatherhood remain low, as discussed, and will remain so whilst ever fixed perceptions of gender roles remain (Connell, 2002) and whilst ever paid work is valued more than the unpaid work of caring for one's own children (Ulanowsky, 1987; Tronto, 1993; James, 2007).

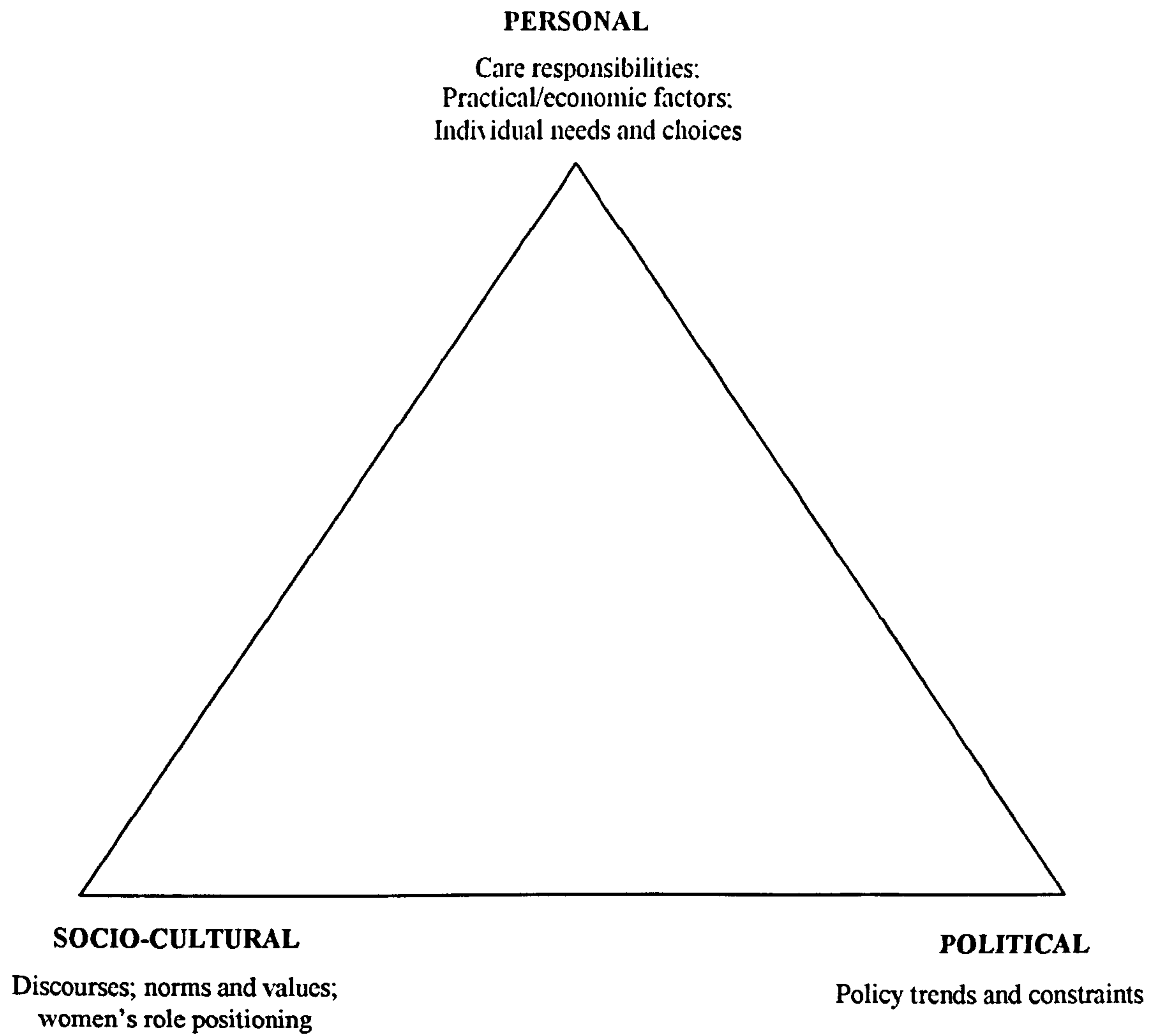
Lastly, for parents of the future there is strong argument for Education for Parenthood programmes to be brought back into the personal education curricula of schools and colleges. Sound initiatives developed and implemented in the 1970s and 1980s unfortunately had declined by the 1990s due to changed educational priorities (Ulanowsky, 1987). It is strongly argued that young people need space and opportunity to think through issues around parenthood before they reach the stage of producing children themselves.

7. Closing remarks

There are many ways to be a mother. In the research, the personal accounts of mothers from two generational contexts presented rich data. This was analysed and interrogated and the pivotal findings discussed in this chapter, with reference to the literature. Overall, it was revealed that whilst motherhood was significantly valued in the participants' lives, for many, it came with considerable personal cost. Positive feedback, special bonuses and career advancement do not accrue from making a supreme effort as a mother, as they found. Some had not realised that the benefits of good mothering are frequently a long way down the line, for motherhood is a future-oriented role. Role perceptions of motherhood changed between the two generations, and the complexity of disentangling individual need and personal preference from contemporaneous discourse made its positioning in the women's lives problematic.

Considerable power resides with government to resolve the production/reproduction tension in women's lives. Society expects a great deal of them as mothers, yet so far has failed to provide a policy framework capacious enough to incorporate both individual and mothering needs. Mothers, it is argued, should be given adequate space and resource to choose the best means of protecting themselves and their children from emotional and

material jeopardy as far as they are able. This is not a question of prescription but one of implementing practical arrangements for wider choice. If the object of social action is human flourishing, greater acknowledgement of the parenting process and the critical role it plays in society is required. In late modernity individual choice has become an insistent mantra, yet women of education and achievement who happen to be mothers are not yet free to contextualise this important role into their lives as they would wish. Whilst motherhood should never subsume personhood, a woman needs supported space for its full realisation if that is her choice.



CALL FOR SUBJECTS TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Women as mothers: changing role perceptions

I am a regional academic working for The School of Health and Social Welfare at The Open University. For my PhD research I am conducting a comparative study on *Women as Mothers: changing role perceptions*, with the intention of mapping changes over time. I am looking for people to participate in some fieldwork for this study. The NCT has kindly given permission for me to contact the e-group membership in the hope that some of you might be interested in taking part.

The focus will be on women who became mothers in the 1970s, in comparison with those who became mothers in the 1990s. I am seeking (circa) 30 women – half who became mothers for the first time in the 1970s, half who became mothers for the first time in the 1990s. The fieldwork is planned as a series of four Focus groups. Each person taking part would be required for about two hours. Primarily, these groups will explore, largely in group format, a range of topics central to the enquiry. These topics will include, for example, parental role status; identity; biographical disruption; role balance and role strain – overall to explore the tension between ‘parenthood’ and ‘personhood’. Further details of the study will be sent to participants beforehand, to encourage personal reflection, prior to involvement in the Focus groups.

To ensure accurate representation of the data, the Focus group discussions will be audio-recorded, though confidentiality and anonymity for participants will, at all times, be assured. The School of Health and Social Welfare has wide experience of work in

research-sensitive areas, so is aware of the ethical protocols for such fieldwork methods. To restrict the geographical range, it is hoped that the Focus groups might be formed from participants living in the Nottingham and London areas only. In each case, expenses will be reimbursed for travel from home to the local Open University centres, where the meetings will take place. It would, however, be good to hear from other interested parties, *not* living in the named areas who might be interested in being involved in a small initial study which would not involve face-to-face meetings.

As a member of The Trust for some 20 years, and a one-time ante-natal teacher, I should welcome the opportunity of involving members in this research which has, at its centre, the motherhood role.

If you would like to take part, please reply, as soon as possible, by e-mail or write to me at the following address: #

The School of Health and Social Welfare,
The Open University,
Clarendon Park, Sherwood Rise,
Nottingham NG5 1AH

With best wishes

Carole Ulanowsky

APPENDIX III TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Dear

Research: Women as Mothers – Telephone Interviews

You may remember I was in touch with you earlier about the above research project. I am hoping to conduct some telephone interviews with a small number of mothers early in July to help me formulate some topics for the later Focus Groups, planned for September, in London and Nottingham.

You expressed an interest in being involved in the study and, whilst you live too far away to be involved in the Focus Groups, it would be helpful if you could spare a little time to be involved in the preliminary telephone pilot. I estimate that this would take no more than one hour of your time.

Broadly speaking, I should like to hear about your experiences of motherhood – about how you felt about the role in the early days, and what choices you made around holding on to the former ‘you’ (pre-motherhood). I’d like to touch on issues concerning who or what influenced the choices you made and how, in retrospect, you feel about the experience.

You may recall that my key focus is to compare changes in mothers’ role perceptions of themselves, looking at 2 generation sets – 1970s and 1990s. This is not only about the much-debated issue of work/care balance in women’s lives but about wider issues also.

I won’t go on because I don’t want to pre-empt the direction of our conversation which I am looking forward to.

It would be most helpful if you could fill in the attached 'time-chart' indicating when you could be available to take a call from me. Please could you return this as soon as possible, so arrangements can be set in place.

With grateful thanks

Best wishes

Carole Ulanowsky

APPENDIX IV LETTER TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Dear

Women as Mothers: changing role perceptions

Focus Groups:

Nottingham: Wednesday 12 September (1990s Mothers)

Thursday 13 September (1970s Mothers)

London: Wednesday 19 September (1970s Mothers)

Thursday 20 September (1990s Mothers)

I am very pleased that you have agreed to take part in one of the Focus Group discussions for the above study. The research is designed to plot the changing perceptions of women in the motherhood role, though time.

The fieldwork for the study includes the pilot telephone discussion (now complete), and the Focus Groups in Nottingham and London, where each group will comprise approximately 4-6 participants. Primarily the study is of women from 2 generational sets – those who became mothers in the 1970s and those who became mothers in the 1990s.

Whilst it was always expected that this study would highlight some significant differences, some similarities are also emerging. One area of note (from the telephone interviews) is

how women's role choices are still constrained and influenced by time-specific norms and values.

It is hoped that the group discussion, which will be quite informal, will touch upon a range of topics. These may include, for example, the personal impact of motherhood on you; sources of support – including the father's role; conflicting role obligations; motherhood role satisfactions; role status etc. Between now and when we meet, you might like to think about these and other issues which were/are significant to you. To ensure accurate representation of what the group participants have to say, the discussion will be audio-recorded, though anonymity for all participants will be assured at the transcribing stage. The Open University's School of Health and Social Welfare has considerable experience of conducting fieldwork in sensitive areas, so are aware of the ethical protocols.

I hope our evening together will ensure a relaxed, inter-active and interesting experience for you. I should like to reassure you that we're *not* looking for 'right' answers, or 'perfect' mothers, but to open up opportunity to share personal perspectives. As this is the case, what you have to say as an individual mother will be valuable to hear.

Please find enclosed a programme sheet setting out arrangements for the evening. Light refreshments will be available and I enclose a map showing the location of The Open University East Midlands Regional Centre at Clarendon Park, Nottingham, NG5 1AH or The Open University London Regional Centre, Parsifal College, 527 Finchley Road, London NW3 7BG. We shall be supplying you with a travel claim form so please keep a note of mileage etc.

Do get in touch with me at The East Midlands Centre on the above number, or at home (01777-707539) or by email: c.e.ulanowsky@open.ac.uk if you need any further information or would like to have a chat with me before the Focus Group discussion takes place.

I am very much looking forward to meeting with you.

With best wishes

Carole Ulanowsky

(Staff Tutor, School of Health and Social Welfare and member of the Children and Families Programme, The Open University)

APPENDIX V TOPIC LIST

A The unpaid care role

B 24-hour responsibility of motherhood

C Personal importance of becoming a mother

D Retaining an identity separate from the motherhood role

E Support (who met/meets my needs?)

F Perceptions of adequacy/inadequacy in the motherhood role

G Influential messages about motherhood from: Peers; Partner; Family; Media; Society?

H Decision-making about childcare – choices and compromises

I My child at the centre of concern

J Separation anxiety

K Second and subsequent children – different role choices

L Financial considerations

M Motherhood role: role satisfactions and role delight

N Motherhood role: frustrations and difficulties

O Motherhood as a change agent for me as a person

P Conflicting role obligations – keeping a life balance

Q Powerful role models for me

R The importance of status inside/outside the role

S Fathers – do they have a better deal than mothers?

T Influences/constraints on choice

U Balancing rights and responsibilities (your child, your child's father, your employer, you)

V What facilitates(d) your mothering skills, what inhibits(d)?

W Pre-motherhood identity

X

Y

Z

APPENDIX VI FOCUS GROUPS: FACILITATOR'S NOTES

Women as Mothers: changing role perceptions

THE FOCUS GROUPS – FACILITATOR'S NOTES

It should always be remembered that the focus group is meant to be tapping into group life, not changing it

(Bloor, 2001)

Equipment: Cassette players; microphones; spare batteries; cassettes; topic cards (2 sets); clock; flip-chart and felt tip pens; 'post-its'; note book and pen; water jug and glasses

(Beforehand: refreshments; name badges; expenses claim forms)

Setting up the discussion

- Make sure everyone is seated in sight of everyone else and in reasonable proximity to the microphone.
- Thank the participants again for agreeing to take part and remind them of the purpose of the meeting.
- Explain how the session will run, including finishing times, comfort break etc and deal with any health and safety issues.
- Agree the Ground-rules and note these on flipchart; place within sight of everyone.

Other points

- Ask the participants to say their name prior to speaking on the first 2 occasions, to assist with voice identification at the transcription stage.
- Remind the participants that, prior to transcription, their names will be changed to ensure anonymity.
- Assure the participants that the audio cassettes will be kept securely.

Discussion process

- **Switch on the cassette players** and invite participants to say their name in turn, plus the ages of their children.
- **Rewind and play back** to test for clarity/volume.
- **Switch off cassette players** for the 'Ice-breaker' and Topic Sort.
- Ice-breaker: ask participants to repeat their first name and either (i) to explain why their parents chose the name, if known, or (ii) to say whether they like/don't like their name and why.
- Topic Sort: place a set of topic cards on the table in front of each of 2 'sub-groups' of 2/3 participants. Explain that they will be given about 5 minutes to negotiate with their partner(s) a small number of topics (3/4) which they would prioritise as being/having been important issues for them, as mothers.
- Place the prioritised cards chosen in the centre of the table as 'aide memoirs'.
- **Switch on the cassette players** and agree one topic to trigger the discussion.
- After about $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 hour (use judgement) **switch off the cassette players** for a 5 minute comfort break. Change the cassettes.

- **Switch on the cassette players** and proceed with the discussion until the end of the allotted time.
- **Switch off the cassette players** at a suitable point when the discussion can be brought to a close.
- Thank the participants for their time and contributions.
- Offer a short evaluation exercise prior to departure: hand out 2 'post-its' to each participant and invite them to write anonymous responses to (i) 'How did you find the focus group discussion?' (ii) 'How do you feel now?'
- Remind the participants of my contact details should they wish to contact me for a chat at some point afterwards.
- Ask them to stick the 'post-its' on to the flipchart as they leave.
- Close.

Carole Ulanowsky (Facilitator)

APPENDIX VII: FOCUS GROUPS: SESSION OUTLINE

Research: Women as Mothers: changing role perceptions

FOCUS GROUPS

Nottingham

1990s mothers - Wednesday 12 September

1970s mothers - Thursday 13 September

At The Open University Regional Centre, Nottingham

London

1970s mothers - Wednesday 19 September

1990s mothers - Thursday 20 September

At The Open University Regional Centre, London

Session Outline

6.15 Meet, welcome and refreshments

- **Introductions and Icebreaker**
- **Ground-rules**
- **Focus group discussion**
- **Short comfort break**
- **Discussion continues**
- **Feedback exercise**

8.30 Close

Facilitator: Carole Ulanowsky

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